

THESIS
THE INFLUENCE OF VAN WYCK BROOKS
ON SUBSEQUENT CRITICS OF MARK TWAIN

BY
DONALD EUGENE SCHEIN
APRIL 1947

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THESIS

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ON SUBSEQUENT CRITICS OF MARK TWAIN

BY -

DONALD EUGENE SCHEIN
(A.B. NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY 1947)

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

1948

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This book was the first major piece of critical work on Twain to be published after his death. The picture it has of Twain as a darling was not a flattering one. The historical analysis has received much comment, both favorable and unfavorable, even to the present time, some twenty-eight years after its publication.

1. INTRODUCTION

Statement of Purpose. It is the purpose of this study (1) to weed out all the hazy, vague criticism about Twain; (2) to collect all the critical material that shows the influence of Brooks; (3) to see what additional light has been thrown on the main arguments that comprise the Brooksian thesis; (4) to determine how much of Brooks' criticism is valid in the light of the evidence.

INTRODUCTION

In 1920, Van Wyck Brooks wrote The Ordeal of Mark Twain. The book was an analysis of the life of Mark Twain, written in an effort to explain why, as Brooks contended, Mark Twain failed to become the great artistic figure that Brooks thought he might have been; why, according to Brooks, he produced less than a handful of books that will have any lasting value, why he allied himself with the majority, and lived to a tragic old age beset with pessimism, despair, and a philosophy of determinism.

This book was the first major piece of criticism on Mark Twain to be published after his death. The picture it painted of America's darling was not a flattering likeness. The Brooksonian analysis has received much comment, both favorable and unfavorable, even to the present time, some twenty-eight years after its publication.

1. PURPOSE

Statement of Purpose. It is the purpose of this study (1) to weed out of all the Mark Twain criticism since 1920 the critical material that shows the influence of Brooks; (2) to see what additional light has been thrown on the main arguments that comprise the Brooksonian thesis; (3) to ascertain how much of Brooks' criticism is valid in the light of the criticism

following it; (4) to show the trend of Mark Twain criticism with regard to the Brooksian thesis from 1920 to the present time; (5) to give a present day picture of Mark Twain in the light of what seems to be the most valid criticism to date, including some recent writing by Brooks on Mark Twain; (6) to estimate, in the light of the Mark Twain criticism from 1920 to the present, what influence, if any, The Ordeal of Mark Twain, has today.

Importance of the Study. In the field of literary criticism, conflict of opinion, however justified, seems inevitable. Very often, agreement can be found on important points, however, which throws much light on the material being criticised. There has been considerable divergence of opinion not only on the works of Mark Twain, but on the man himself. Van Wyck Brooks made an analysis of the man's life. He used the books that Mark Twain wrote, the biographical material that had been written about him, and information about the places in which he lived, for the basis of his theory. What he said about Mark Twain challenged the previous conceptions of him and, as a consequence, much additional research and criticism were done on Mark Twain. It is important, in a consideration of a literary figure of the stature, if we are to come to a clearer, more accurate picture of the man, to ascertain the validity of Brooks' theory in the light of what subsequent critics have had to say, and also to recognize the extent to which they were influenced by him.

CHAPTER I

THE BROOKSIAN THESIS AND ITS IMMEDIATE RECEPTION

To many readers of Mark Twain has come the realization that here is an author whose books were not all of a piece. His earlier works were humorous narratives, tall tales, travel stories; they were full of exaggeration, fantasy and satire. But after Huckleberry Finn (1885), traces of bitterness began to appear, especially in Following the Equator (1897). This undercurrent became more dominant in the pessimistic What is Man (1883), The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg (1899), and The Mysterious Stranger (1899).

The unevenness in Mark Twain's writing and the varied roles he played during his life gave his biographers as well as his readers much room for speculation about his later pessimism and his philosophy of determinism. Contemporary literary attempts at an understanding of the forces at work on Mark Twain's life lacked the perspective of time. His great personal magnetism made it difficult to regard the work without reference to the man.

Albert Bigelow Paine, his biographer, argued that Mark Twain was not really a pessimist at heart. He cited Keller's remark on Mark Twain's seventieth birthday. She said that a pessimist before forty-eight knows too much, while an optimist after forth-eight knows too little. Since Mark Twain did not know little and was an optimist, he must be only forty-seven.

¹Albert Bigelow Paine, The Boy's Life of Mark Twain, (Harper and Bros. Co.; New York, 1935), p. 308.

But Paine also includes a point that Mark Twain and H. H. Rogers had agreed upon when Mark Twain was in his seventies. This was that they both had had enough of this world. Paine comments, "One could remember a thousand poor and obscure men who were perfectly willing to go on struggling and starving, postponing the day of settlement as long as possible; but perhaps when one has had all the world has to give, when there are no new worlds in sight to conquer, one has a different feeling."²

Brander Matthews found Mark Twain "a sincere observer of life," one whose humor did not detract from his respect for eternal truths. He stood on his own feet and made his own decisions. His laughter was not directed at the old Masters but at those who would pay lip service to what they do not understand. He was a champion of the weak but he spared no³ compassion on the hypocrites, pretenders or frauds.

After Mark Twain had been gone five years, Fred Lewis Pattee found three Mark Twains: the comedian, the "indignant protester," and the romancer. As a romancer, asserts Pattee, Mark Twain will live. He has drawn from the life of America rather than Europe to teach truth. He was not an artist, for

²Albert Bigelow Paine, Mark Twain: A Biography (Harper and Bros. Co.: New York, 1912) Vol. 4, p. 1338.

³Brander Matthews, Introduction to The Hillcrest Edition of Mark Twain's Works. (Harper Bros.: New York, 1906)

he was not a bookish man. He was a student of people.⁴

Gamaliel Bradford did not read Brooks' book until after he had written his own portrait of Mark Twain. He did read The Ordeal, however, before his American Portraits went to press. His comment in his preface was that what Brooks had said about Mark Twain did not alter the portrait he had drawn. But he confesses, "I shall never be sure that if I had read Mr. Brooks first my portrait would not have been different and better."⁵ Bradford's conclusion about Mark Twain is that here was a bitter satirist like Moliere, Ben Jonson or Swift-- bitter because his mind was shallow. His humor created happiness, but his irreverence, sadness.⁶

By 1920, the criticism of Mark Twain was still slight. Controversy over various aspects of his life was often based on conjecture or the citing of isolated incidents or quotations. This method of criticism was to be a major drawback to later interpretations of the man.

In 1920, Van Wuck Brooks pushed his seemingly irreverent The Ordeal of Mark Twain upon the literary scene. Its edition of forty-five hundred copies exploded the Mark Twain myth, and

⁴Fred Lewis Pattee, A History of American Literature Since 1870 (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1915) pp. 58-61.

⁵Gamaliel Bradford, American Portraits (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin Company, 1922), p. X.

⁶Ibid., p. 19.

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Since 1890 (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1912)
 pp. 18-19.

Charles Bradford, *Mark Twain* (Boston: Houghton

and Mifflin Company, 1912, p. 18.

1890, p. 18.

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many people were indignant--indignant enough to set about a reconsideration and re-evaluation of America's darling. This re-examination of Mark Twain continues to the present and very often the attempts are largely concerned with upholding or discrediting what Brooks wrote in 1920.

The principal problem dealt with by Brooks is Mark Twain's pessimism and despair, which he feels are the result of Mark Twain's "deep malady of the soul."⁷ His inability to accomplish the demands of his inner artistic self resulted in self-hatred, which in turn nourished his hatred for mankind. Brooks quotes a statement by Mark Twain: "What a man sees in the human race is merely himself in the deep and honest privacy of his own heart. Byron despised the race because he despised himself. I feel as Byron did, and for the same reason."⁸ Determinism was embraced as a way of saving face, concludes Brooks, for Mark Twain had failed as a creator, and free will is the very embodiment of creation.

Brooks goes back to the childhood of Sam Clemens to show how from the very start the artist in him was repressed by various factors. This process continued throughout his life, causing a personal tragedy, and--because his gift to mankind fell far short of its potentialities--a tragedy for mankind as

⁷Van Wyck Brooks, The Ordeal of Mark Twain, (New York, E. P. Dutton and Company, 1920), p. 10.

⁸Ibid., p. 13.

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well. Brooks finds four basic reasons for Mark Twain's failure to achieve his highest fulfillment: there was that barren, cultureless frontier where he was born and reared; there was the influence of his Calvinist mother, for whom he felt he must be a success materially (which success, of necessity, came at the expense of artistic fulfillment); there was the loss of his individuality at the hands of his wife and her friends, who moulded him into a form to fit the social graces of a conventional society; finally, there was the Gilded Age itself, which used money as the only measuring stick of a man's worth, compromising man's individuality, and conspiring against the creative life, sending men like Henry James, Henry Adams and James Whistler to Europe, disillusioned with democracy.

The argument has many ramifications, and in order fully to appreciate the position of Brooks' critics and supporters it is necessary to consider it at some length.

According to Brooks, the stage was set for young Sam's repression long before he was born. His mother was in love with a young doctor and after a quarrel with him, she consented to marry John Clemens. The acceptance of a second choice produced a loveless family. Young Sam was in "perpetual revolt" against the Calvinist tradition handed down by his mother. His father, John Clemens, "that poor, taciturn, sunstruck failure,"

⁹Brooks, op. cit., p. 36.

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was unable to make a success of life, and died when Sam was¹⁰ but twelve. Brooks uses Paine's description of the twelve-year-old boy by the side of the open coffin, being made to promise his mother to be faithful, industrious and upright. This Brooks sees as the turning point of Sam's life, for his responsibility is now at odds with his inner instincts, and a¹¹ dual personality is the result. The split is first manifested by sleep-walking on a few successive nights after that fateful promise.

Brooks' speculation on what might have happened if Jane Clemens had been different is worth mentioning not only as part of his thesis, but also because it is the subject of some satirical comment by a critic who twenty-five years later ex-¹²hibited a strong Brooksonian influence. Brooks conjectures that:

If Jane Clemens had been a woman of wide experience and independent mind, in proportion to the strength of her character, Mark Twain's career might have been wholly different. Had she been catholic in her sympathies, in her understanding of life, then, no matter how more than maternal her attachment to her son was, she might have placed before him and encouraged him to pursue interests and activities amid which he could eventually have recovered his balance, reduced the filial bond to its normal measure and stood on his own feet. But that is to wish for a type of woman our old pioneer society could never have produced.¹³

¹⁰Ibid., p. 47.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 40-42.

¹²Cf. William C. S. Pellowe, Mark Twain, Pilgrim from Hannibal, (New York: Hobson Book Press, 1945), pp. 69-73.

¹³Brooks, op. cit., p. 34.

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If Jane Clayton had been a woman of wide experience
and independent mind, in proportion to the strength of her
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her understanding of life, then, no matter how more than
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¹⁰Ibid., p. 47.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 40-42.

¹²cf. William C. S. Feltow, Mark Twain, Pilgrim from
Hannibal, (New York: Hobson Book Press, 1933), pp. 24-25.

¹³Brooks, op. cit., p. 24.

The frontier with its violence, its litter, its lack of culture, was the "barrenest spot in all Christendom, surely, for the seed of genius to fall in."¹⁴ Young Sam saw violence: several murders and stabbings, and innumerable fights, marks not easily erased from the mind of a sensitive child. A similar situation was found in the Nevada frontier, a rough civilization where lawlessness prevailed. In Virginia City, "the spirit of the artist had about as much chance of developing... as a butterfly in a blazing chimney." Brooks quotes Mark Twain in Roughing It:

'There were military companies, fire companies, brass bands, banks, hotels, theaters, 'hurdy-gurdy houses', wide-open gambling palaces, political pow-wows, civic processions, street-fights, murders, inquests, riots, a whiskey mill every fifteen steps, a dozen breweries, and half a dozen jails and station-houses in full operation, and some talk of building a church.'¹⁵

Brooks found in Sam's running away from home and becoming a river boat pilot, the resolution of a dilemma, that of fulfilling the inner artistic drive and also satisfying his promise to his mother to make money for her. Being a pilot gave one the freedom of a king, and later in life Mark Twain admitted he had received a comprehensive education in the ways of people while steamboating on the Mississippi River. Becoming a pilot taxed his mental resources to the stretching

¹⁴Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁵Brooks, op. cit., p. 75.

point and gave him a strong sense of accomplishment when he achieved his goal. And along with piloting he set himself to learn history, science, literature, and languages. He read considerably and achieved the distinction of having the pilots¹⁶ consider it an education and an entertainment to know him.

The fact that the Civil War came along to disrupt his career as a pilot is seen by Brooks as one of the foundation stones in that dark and foreboding edifice, Determinism, in whose shadow he spent the last years of his life. The brief substitution of a soldier's life for one that had been marked by self-confidence, self-respect, fulfillment of inner needs and drives, was a tremendous letdown; it became, as Brooks¹⁷ says, "a reversion to a previous infantile frame of mind." But his life as a soldier was a brief, transitory one, and he was shortly on the way to Nevada, the mining country, where amid a violent existence of prospecting, speculation, and mining, he was to compromise his individuality. Individuality and achievement in a man singled him out for abuse; conformity and averagism were the order of the day, and Sam Clemens cast aside his life of purpose for one of ease and the accumulation of wealth.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁷ Brooks, op. cit., p. 53.

This pursuit of wealth was the vita optima in America, and the amount of money and possessions one accumulated was used as an adequate measure of one's position in society. How a man accumulated his wealth was of less importance. The great promise to the pioneer was wealth, and the pursuit of that promise was the great American leveller which made Americans a "simple, homogeneous folk before the Civil War."¹⁸ They rejected criticism and romanticized their position. There was "a sort of unconscious conspiracy (which) actuated all America against the creative spirit. In an age when every sensitive mind in England was in full revolt against the blind, mechanical, devastating forces of a 'progress' that promised nothing but the ultimate collapse of civilization; when all Europe was alive with prophets,....crying out, in the name of the human spirit, against the obscene advance of capitalistic industrialism;..."¹⁹ in that age there was no cry in America. The only sound came from the machine. This was the America of the Gilded Age, "a dark jumble of decayed faiths, of unconfessed class distinctions, of repressed desires, of inarticulate misery--read The Story of a Country Town, and A Son of the Middle Border, and Ethan Frome."²⁰

¹⁸Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁹Brooks, op. cit., p. 65.

²⁰Ibid., p. 71.

In Carson City Mark Twain was regarded as an indolent fellow who enjoyed his life of ease. For the most part he conformed, but when his individuality broke through, he was often the victim of a practical joke, something he could never endure. When it became evident that his mining ventures were not succeeding, he accepted a position as a reporter on the Virginia City Territorial Enterprise, which had been printing some humorous articles he had submitted. His arrival at the Enterprise office, on foot, was prefaced by a week-long walk of one hundred and thirty miles, mostly through uninhabited territory. Brooks interprets his sojourn in the wilderness as the resolving of his inner conflict. His desire was to be an artist, but he had promised to make money for his mother. The dilemma was solved by becoming a humorist. But this action, according to Brooks, made Sam Clemens feel that he was selling his soul; and for this reason he rebelled at the role of humorist for the rest of his life. He had sacrificed himself on the alter of Mammon.

Brooks finds significant motives in Sam's acquisition of a pen name when he joined the staff of the Enterprise. It indicates, says Brooks, that Sam did not want his work associated with his own name because he was ashamed of what he was doing: "....he had no pride in his work."²¹ Brooks mentions that Paine

²¹Brooks, op. cit., p. 85.

found in the pen name merely the assumption of a trade mark, a custom which was prevalent at the time; but Brooks also states that the very lives of writers in the barbaric frontier were in danger--they needed the protection of a pen name. The fact that Mark Twain means safe water in river parlance was an added indication to Brooks of the need for protection.

Mark Twain's conscience gave him little rest; his letters home were concerned largely with his financial progress, not with his work. He was unable to stay in one place for any length of time. When in 1865 his Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County was published in New York, and received wide acclaim, he was not happy over its success. Brooks sees in this disappointment the realization that henceforth his writing would be as a trade, turning out humor for public consumption. Such was not the way of the artist, and he rebelled at the prospect.

Gradually, however, Mark Twain began to accept his position as one of the foremost humorists of his day. Acclamation by James Russell Lowell, Artemus Ward, Anson Burlingame, and Henry Ward Beecher helped suppress that artistic spirit that cried out for attention, yet during the height of his success he wrote his mother, "Under a cheerful exterior, I have a spirit that is angry with me and gives me freely of its contempt."²² He saw in this public approbation of him as a

²²Brooks, op. cit., p. 98.

humorist another link in the deterministic chain of events that was to lead to his ultimate philosophy.

In marriage, Mark Twain hoped to find the freedom to write as his conscience demanded, but, according to Brooks, he found instead that marriage offered no release. Olivia was too much like his mother. His training had not prepared him for the social customs of that Elmira clique, and she became like a second mother to him. He was "Youth," and loved being subservient to her. This was not difficult because he had enjoyed being mothered as a boy and he never really grew up.

Greater social and financial responsibility was thrust upon Mark Twain as a result of this marriage. Olivia had the task of polishing this rough stone, but his writing needed a toning down, too, and she applied herself vigorously to both tasks. He loved it. As Brooks sees it, she ordered the almost complete emasculation of his writing. Virility to her was as offensive as profanity; she could not distinguish between profanity or vulgarity, and virility. To her, strong language was simply bad manners.

Having been given a co-ownership in the Buffalo Express by Jervis Langdon, Olivia's father, Mark Twain immediately published a promise to be good and not do anything that would hurt the prosperity of the paper. This surrender to business was the first of many. In later years he was to become so involved with business interests that his entanglements were a veritable gag to his voice of protest. The shaping of his

future by others led Mark Twain to write in later years, "A man is never anything but what his outside influences have made him."²³

Literary work for Mark Twain was just one of many activities. The new home in Hartford was run at a great expense (over one hundred thousand dollars running expense in 1881, says Brooks), and Mark Twain's insistence on having his social life in his own home kept entertainment costs very high. Thus the admiration of wealth received his greatest attention, while other writers fought the excesses of Capitalist Industrialism, and he became "the spokesman of the Philistine majority."²⁴

He planned a book on England, but did not complete it for fear that his criticism might offend a nation that had accepted him. "He failed to rise to the conception of literature as a great impersonal social instrument."²⁵ Individuality in the society in which he had become immersed was frowned upon. Fighting the current was hopeless; as he floated downstream, and lavished praise upon H. H. Rogers, Andrew Carnegie, Uncle Joe Cannon; he glorified the Age that produced them; he congratulated Whitman for having lived in the age.

Brooks claims that the real Mark Twain, the artist, never

²³Brooks, op. cit., p. 126.

²⁴Ibid., p. 137.

²⁵Ibid., p. 141.

developed fully, for his major books are concerned with children; he was never capable of sustained reflection; he was always responsible to others for ideas and editing; he showed no interest in technique; he was impetuous; he lacked self-knowledge, self-control, and industry. He felt he had reached the fulfillment of his inner demands when he wrote Joan of Arc, and this had to be published anonymously because people expected only humorous works from him. His constant preoccupation with his childhood is interpreted by Brooks as showing the suppressed artist. The future held no promise for the satisfaction of his inner drive, and so he turned to the past and wrote about it.

Mark Twain's daughter Susy, whom Brooks calls "a born psychologist," was always troubled about him; she was the only one in the family circle who really understood him and saw a spirit at odds with itself. She was fourteen and he was at the height of his success when she wrote that he could have done a great deal more, "if he had had the advantages with which he could have developed the gifts which he has made no use of in writing his books."²⁶

This inner conflict which sapped the animus of Mark Twain manifested itself in several ways. Brooks sees in the failure of Mark Twain's business ventures the result of an inner drive that pointed in the opposite direction. His carelessness or

²⁶Brooks, op. cit., p. 154.

developed fully. For his other books are concerned with children; he was never capable of sustained reflection; he was always responsive to others for ideas and editing; he showed no interest in technique; he was impetuous; he lacked self-control, self-control, and industry. He felt he had reached the fulfillment of his inner demands when he wrote Jack of the and this had to be published anonymously because people expected only humorous works from him. His constant pressure on him with his childhood is illustrated by his own admission: "I cannot hold to promises for the sake of my reputation of his literary drive, and so he turned to the novel and wrote about it."

Mary Twain's daughter, Mary, whom Twain called "a born psychologist," was always troubled about him; she was the only one in the family circle who really understood him and saw a wealth of good within himself. She was fourteen when he was at the height of his success when she wrote that he could have done a great deal more. "At the time he had the very notion with which he could have developed the gift which he had no use of in writing his books."

This inner conflict which sawed the genius of Mary Twain manifested itself in several ways. It broke down in the failure of Mary Twain's business ventures; the result of an inner drive that pointed in the opposite direction. His carelessness or

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absent-mindedness resulted in the death of his son by pneumonia and a narrow escape for one of his daughters whose perambulator he allowed to run down a hill, spilling the child onto the

²⁷ground. He read writers who had spoken out against conditions they knew were wrong. This practice was a compensation for his own inability to do the same, and Brooks finds additional evidence of this in the forward to the posthumously published

What Is Man?, wherein Mark Twain admits that he did not speak out in his lifetime because of the disapproval of the people around him. His verbal "Rabelaisianisms" were the result of "that vital sap" being driven inward and "left there to ferment."²⁸

When the Paige typesetting machine, that costly fiasco, was recognized as a complete failure, the blow to his alter ego was such that the subconscious artist arose and asserted itself in The American Claimant, Pudd'nhead Wilson, and The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg. This last Brooks believes to be Mark Twain's indictment of his society, which refused to accept him as an artist and forced him into the role of humorist. This then was the deep offence that the stranger received, the offence which he had not deserved and for which he wished to repay them all. These people were the pillars of the town--

²⁷Brooks, op. cit., p. 181.

²⁸Ibid., p. 185.

absent-mindedness resulted in the death of his son by pneumonia and a narrow escape for one of his daughters whose pneumonia

he allowed to run down a hill, spilling the child onto the ground. He read writers who had spoken out against conditions they knew were wrong. This practice was a compensation for his own inability to do the same, and Brooks finds additional evi-

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²⁷Brooks, op. cit., p. 181.

²⁸Ibid., p. 182.

to Mark Twain the pillars of society--those very people who in his own life had "suppressed his true opinions, his real desires, who despised him for what he was and admired him only for the success he had attained in spite of it."²⁹

Brooks contends that whenever he spoke from the soul, Mark Twain used some sort of a device for protection. In Huckleberry Finn, he speaks in the guise of a young wastrel, for whose opinion the author could not be censored. In addition he includes in his preface a challenge to anyone who attempts to read anything into his book. It reads:

Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.³⁰

In the case of Pudd'nhead Wilson, Pudd'nhead is a "crack-brained fool," and Lord Berkeley, an "English snob," thus neither of them can be expected to know much about America. "As long as he never hit below the belt by speaking in his own person, he was secure."³¹

Brooks finds that Mark Twain's humor developed during the fierce life in Nevada where all writers became humorists. The Nevada country needed humorists because of the mad pace at

²⁹Brooks, op. cit., p. 191.

³⁰Ibid., p. 195.

³¹Ibid., p. 194.

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Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be overwhelmed; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be puzzled; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.²⁹

In the case of Endreth Wilson, Endreth is a "crack-brained fool," and Lord Berkeley, an "English snob," thus neither of them can be expected to know much about America. As long as he never let before the belt by speaking in his own person, he was secure."³⁰

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²⁹ Brooks, op. cit., p. 191.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 192.

³¹ Ibid., p. 194.

which the miners lived. Mark Twain wanted to be a satirist, but it was the threat of social extinction both in Nevada and in California that prevented him from such action. After he arrived in the East, the public expected humor in everything he wrote. Then too his promise to make good necessitated his following the most lucrative pursuit that lay open to him. Thus his early success as a humorist and the pressure of a country hungry for the emotional release that came with humor combined to guide his course of action. But to Brooks, acquisition is incompatible with creation, and so the humorist in Mark Twain was a destructive force applied to beauty and culture.³²

In business his success came at the cost of a great suppression of his individuality, for acquisition and creation are strange bedfellows. This, Brooks felt, accounts for the business man's proverbial "hatred of the artist."³³ Mark Twain played along with business interests even to the extent of enabling the business man "to laugh at art, at antiquity, at chivalry, at beauty, and return to his desk with an infinitely intensified conceit in his own worthiness and well-being."³⁴ This is what made The Innocents Abroad so popular, for by

³²Brooks, op. cit., p. 212.

³³Ibid., p. 212.

³⁴Ibid., p. 213.

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³² Brooks, op. cit., p. 218.

³³ Ibid., p. 218.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 218.

ridiculing culture it gave Americans a reason for not bothering with it, but in degrading the undegradable he degraded himself.³⁵

Thus the process of becoming a humorist was at the same time for Mark Twain, a process of undoing the artist.³⁶ As Mark Twain points out in The Mysterious Stranger, the only effective weapon that man possesses, laughter, is not used because man lacks courage. Brooks feels this is Mark Twain talking about his own failure to use his satire, which had withered in its inactivity to a degree where it had little effect, and was used only in minor work.

So Mark Twain failed as a satirist, unable to bear up in the face of adverse public opinion. With the exception of The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg, he did not rise up against public opinion or the industrial empire. The shameful lynching of Negroes received scant treatment compared to the unjust hanging of people in the seventh century. In attacking the missionaries, he shared the feelings of many leading Americans; he can be given no credit for courageous thought and action because of it. When he constructed something with original explosive force like "The War Prayer," he succumbed to the pressure of friends and did not publish it, because, as he said in defense, he had to support his family. Yet, in 1881 alone, he threw

³⁵Van Wyck Brooks, "Mark Twain's Humor," The Dial, LXVIII (1920), 290.

³⁶Brooks, op. cit., p. 213.

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away forty-six thousand dollars on inventions.

As his life drew to a close, Mark Twain became more and more pessimistic; his feverish writing at the end and his hatred of the human race Brooks attributes to his self-hate for having failed as an artist. He experienced a burning need to redeem himself in his own estimation. Indeed, he had never enjoyed his writing, or he would not have felt at seventy that he had served his term as a writer. Such is not the outlook of an artist. He would not have called his years of writing "moral slavery", for the true artist works to please himself and by so doing brings eternal joy to humanity.³⁷

Mark Twain was always wanting to do the kind of writing that wakes men out of their lethargy. But he was never quite able to do it. Even What Is Man?, published anonymously during his lifetime, was only allowed to bear his name after his death. His autobiography, the book for which the world was waiting, the book with no holds barred, was also to be published posthumously, and even then, with the protection of the grave, he was unable to speak from his heart.

Finally, Mark Twain came upon that soul-saving philosophy, determinism, wherein, "You and I are but sewing machines....,"³⁸ and what we fashion is not our responsibility. It was a terrible price to pay. By not fulfilling his truest impulses

³⁷Brooks, op. cit., p. 247.

³⁸Ibid., p. 261.

Mark Twain never achieved a oneness of the creative life. His energies were dispersed by that inner division which made him the symbol of the creative life in a country where, "by the goodness of God, we have those three unspeakably precious things: freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the ³⁹prudence never to practice either of them."

Thus Van Wyck Brooks sees in Mark Twain a lesson for the artists of America not to succumb to weakness and vacillation, lest they waste their abilities as he did. He closes on a note of exhortation:

Read, writers of America, the driven, disenchanted, anxious faces of your sensitive countrymen; remember the splendid parts your confreres have played in the human drama of other times and other peoples, and ask yourselves whether the hour has not come to ⁴⁰put away childish things and walk the stage as poets do.

* * * * *

The immediate response of the critics to The Ordeal of Mark Twain was well divided. Those who had known Mark Twain personally were up in arms. Some felt that Brooks was on the right track, but had gone too far. There had been little Mark Twain criticism up to that time, and The Ordeal of Mark Twain was felt to be a sizable contribution. It was brilliantly done,

³⁹Brooks, op. cit., p. 267.

⁴⁰Loc. cit.

but perhaps a bit over-theorized.

The Ordeal of Mark Twain received front page consideration by William Lyon Phelps in The New York Times Book Review Section. Phelps disagreed with the analysis but thought there was a fine and noble purpose behind it. He found it a call to all writers⁴¹ "not to sin against their talents."

Thirteen years later, Phelps was not so generous. He had had a chance to read the critics of Mark Twain during the ensuing period. He conceded that Brooks had ability to write on Henry James and Emerson, but lacked humor, and so could not write on Mark Twain. Besides, argues Phelps, "On the army of readers who know Huckleberry Finn, it (The Ordeal) has produced no effect."⁴² Perhaps Phelps had not had a chance to read Huckleberry Finn by the time The Ordeal of Mark Twain appeared in 1920.

Richard Burton, who had been a Hartford neighbor of Mark Twain, reviewed the book twice. A few months after the book appeared he felt that it was a delight, although Brooks had "succumbed to the danger which always confronts the thesis-maker," i.e., subduing data to bolster his argument. Burton was disturbed to find that here was not the Mark Twain he had known⁴³ personally.

⁴¹William Lyon Phelps, The New York Times Book Review Section, p. 1, June 27, 1920.

⁴²William Lyon Phelps, "The Real Mark Twain," Scribner's Magazine, XCIII (1933), 182-3.

⁴³Richard Burton, Review of The Ordeal of Mark Twain,

A year later Burton paid homage to The Ordeal of Mark Twain as the first piece of important criticism on Mark Twain, but said it was unsatisfactory; the presentation was appealing, but the conclusion unsound. It was still too close to evaluate the man. The importance of the death of John Clemens was overstressed. Mark Twain was not muzzled by his wife; on the other hand, it was she who saved his reputation by her restraint; his frustration was due to his belief in goodness and kindness, while he was confronted with the meanness and cruelty in the world. So he challenged God. Burton stresses the importance of realizing that Mark Twain was a man of moods and assertions; his comparison of himself to Byron, for example, should be considered as a mood and not a settled attitude.

Burton felt that it was bad taste to bring in Mrs. Clemens, when so many were still alive who knew the family. This argument would meet little sympathy in present-day biographical writing where the trend seems to be toward a disregard of the sensitivities of those concerned, especially when the biographer has an axe to grind. With all his disagreement, Burton still respects Brooks' method, and finds analysis and interpretation important because, although there might be many variants, someone might guess it right.⁴⁴

Booklist, July, 1920.

⁴⁴Richard Burton, "The Mystery of Personality," Bookman, LII (1921), 333-3; 433-7.

It should be noted that in the face of all the opinion and evidence that appeared after this review, Burton's ideas on the whole seem quite well considered, and display fine insight, both as to the character of Mark Twain, and the book by Brooks.

Carl Van Doren found Brooks expecting too much from Mark Twain, and offered the conjecture that perhaps if Mark Twain had been more of an artist he would have contributed less to the American people. Still The Ordeal of Mark Twain was a fascinating book of criticism, although quite polemic. Van Doren also saw it as an indictment against a society which re-
⁴⁵
 presses the artist.

Alvin Johnson attacked Brooks for his failure to appreciate Mark Twain as a humorist. Brooks' mistake was to take "Mark Twain's humorously megalomaniac utterances for serious expressions of a megalomaniac soul," thus missing "the most
⁴⁶
 promising lead in his mountain of ore." And so Brooks missed the humor in the promise Mark Twain made when he assumed the associate editorship of the Buffalo Express. Johnson finds the indictment of the Gilded Age quite valid. It was an age that revered only material success.

⁴⁵Carl Van Doren, "The Fruits of the Frontier", The New York Nation, CXI (1920), 189.

⁴⁶Alvin Johnson, "The Tragedy of Mark Twain," The New Republic, XXIII (1920), 25.

The early criticism levelled at Brooks followed definite patterns. It was felt that he had over-theorized; he had not used the detachment of a historian; his conclusion was over-dramatic and not founded upon fact. These were severe accusations, but his right to pursue his analysis was not attacked. There was value in the method, even if it did not always produce a result that met the approval of critics. Brooks' indictment of the America that produced Mark Twain met with greater approval, but some critics contended that it was stretching reality to claim that the age had had the effect that Brooks claimed. The question of the value of Freudian analysis applied to a person no longer living and the question of the validity of the blame ascribed to the Gilded Age for its materialism were to receive much treatment at the hands of later critics.

In his analysis of Mark Twain, Brooks lays great stress on the early background, during the impressionable years of the child and even before, when the stage was being set for his arrival on the scene. Chapter II is concerned with this discussion and with how the critics have received Brooks' analysis.

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CHAPTER II

EARLY INFLUENCES ON MARK TWAIN

As has been pointed out in Chapter One, the reviewers did not agree as to the value of the various parts of Brooks' thesis. These lines of contention became more and more finely drawn as the years passed. There were always those critics whose reaction was general--supporting or attacking the Brooksonian method. Such general reaction is important as an indicator of critical trends, but it is not worthy of detailed treatment here because of its highly theoretical nature. The light of new evidence cast on the Brooksonian thesis is, however, of real critical value in illuminating the validity of the arguments of Brooks.

These arguments center around the theory that Mark Twain was a victim of conflicting forces: the inner desire to be an artist was stifled by his mother, a barren frontier, his wife and her social group, and lastly, the Gilded Age, which gave weight only to materialism on the scale of value. It was this inability to fulfill his destiny that produced his despair.

In order to see the additional information brought to bear on any of these issues it is necessary to follow the treatment by each successive critic which sheds new light on the problem. This method will also tend to show the

reliability of the criticism: whether it offers new contributions or whether the treatment is merely a rehashing of what previous critics have had to say.

There is no doubt that the early years of a person's life have considerable influence on his future. Brooks' references to a barren, cultureless frontier, a family devoid of love, a childhood beset with brutality and fear, would seem to be important considerations in an analysis of Mark Twain's personality. But it is desirable to question these assertions because they represent interpretation which is always open to question.

Between 1926 and 1930 Lewis Mumford, Lucy Lockwood Hazard, Fred Lewis Pattee, and Vernon Louis Parrington largely upheld Brooks' description of the frontier. Mumford attributed Mark Twain's contempt for mankind to the "unconscious cheapening of values" that were a result of the "miserable struggle for existence that took place in a Missouri pioneer village or a Nevada mining camp."¹ Hazard mentions those "squalid, straggling towns on the southwest frontier."² Pattee sees these early brutalities combining to make Mark Twain want to run away as early as nine. When he finally did break away at the age of eighteen, it was the beginning of the life of a nomad.³

¹Lewis Mumford, The Golden Day, (New York, Boni and Liveright, 1926), p. 171-172.

²Lucy Lockwood Hazard, The Frontier in American Literature, (New York, Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1927), p. 221.

³Fred Lewis Pattee, On the Rating of Mark Twain, American Mercury, XIV (June 1928), 184.

Parrington finds the Calvinist village of great importance. He believes that Mark Twain "could not throw off the frontier-- its psychology and its morality were too deeply intertwined with the primitive self; and the result was a harassing inner conflict that left him maimed."⁴

In the second and third decade following The Ordeal of Mark Twain there was a change in the attitude of critics toward Hannibal and the frontier. This change began abruptly with Bernard De Voto. De Voto used a large section of his Mark Twain's America as a refutation of everything Brooks had said.⁵ He was especially adamant about the Brooksonian treatment of the frontier, which interpretation had been held in high regard. He aimed his attack at Brooks, who had called the frontier "a desert of human sand surely, for the seed of genius to fall in.....lacking for the most part folk art, folk music, folk poetry." He included Waldo Frank, who saw Mark Twain "stifled beneath the brutal burden of the pioneering West . . . a world in which old passions lie stiff upon the ground and rot, and poison the water and blot the air." He brought in Lewis Mumford, who deplored "the crudities of the pioneer's sex life,

⁴Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, (New York, Harcourt and Brace, 1930), p. 28.

⁵Bernard De Voto, Mark Twain's America, (Boston, Little, Brown and Co., 1932), p. 226.

his bestial swilling and drinking and bullying."⁶ Then, with a huge blast, DeVoto knocked down every item.

He argued that the religion of the frontier was Evangelism, not the rigid Puritanism of the East: "The notion of Puritanical abhorrence of sex is a critical cliché and has no correspondence with fact." DeVoto cites the large pioneer families, the tendency for a man to wear out a number of wives; for a girl to keep her virginity until fifteen was exceptional. "Marriages clustered in the three months succeeding every camp meeting, and if young people were to suppress their instincts, the dances, hoedowns, roof-raisings, fanning bees, bobsled rides, barbecues, fiddling matches, etc. were a peculiar way of doing it."⁷

DeVoto found that the frontier was rich in the folk tale, a natural form of folk art, for it was universal and real; it could be corrosive and often was humorous. Its heroes were Davy Crockett, Honest Abe, Old Hickory Kit Carson, and Daniel Boone. It was this literature that young Sam picked up while an apprentice on the newspaper of J. P. Ament and Orion Clemens that was to serve so well as background material in his later writing. The culture of the frontier extended to melodrama,

⁶DeVoto, op. cit., pp. 40-41.

⁷Ibid., p. 44.

music and minstrel shows. There were ballads as well, but DeVoto admits he can only guess that Mark Twain knew them, for⁸ there is no evidence that he did.

DeVoto's book came out a year before the revised edition of The Ordeal of Mark Twain was published. Thus Brooks had a chance to read DeVoto's book, although it is not evident that he did. He made very few changes, about a half dozen, and they were not major changes. His thesis remained intact, although he omitted the passage wherein he had stated that the frontier had no folk culture. The reviewers were dissatisfied on the whole. Many felt that far more drastic changes were warranted. Brooks had committed the unpardonable sin of paying no attention to critics who pointed out mistakes in the first edition of his book.⁹ There were some feelings that psychoanalysis had been proved of little value--that the facts of DeVoto were to be preferred to the "nebular guessings of Mr. Brooks".¹⁰ A reviewer in Dallas, Texas wrote, "The candid person will probably decide that DeVoto is right about the large shaping influence of the frontier upon the humorist, and that not a little of his misanthropy grew out of the

⁸DeVoto, op. cit., pp. 32-36.

⁹J. B. Clark, More Inaccuracies Bewilder Twain Devotees, 1933, Books.

¹⁰Lloyd Lewis, Lloyd Lewis on Mark Twain, n.p., April 19, 1933.

harrying of his mother and then his wife."¹¹ Lewis Mumford, as always, stood by Brooks, arguing that one must interpret a complex personality, and besides, what DeVoto calls facts are very often his own ideas. Personal investigation is as old as Shakespeare, and the question is not whether the man is right according to scientific fact, but whether the view has validity.¹² Surface data is not biography; it is just a book of facts.

But Mumford was distorting DeVoto's book, which was not simply a book of facts. DeVoto had stressed interpretation based on fact as being valid, in contrast to the invalid emotional theorizing he found in The Ordeal of Mark Twain.

DeVoto was largely backed up by Professor Minnie M. Brashear, who confirmed his picture of Hannibal but went a step further, in her contention that as with Lincoln, who came out of discouraging frontier conditions, there was no place in America more favorable for Mark Twain's start than northeast Missouri.¹³ She felt that it was ridiculous to say that Hannibal was ignorant, for ignorance is relative. Hannibal had a culture of its own. Its educational facilities were above the

¹¹E.E. Leisy, "Critic and Humorist-Writers of Mark Twain Leave Much Unsaid," Dallas Morning News, April 2, 1933.

¹²Lewis Mumford, "Prophet, Pedant and Pioneer," Saturday Review of Literature, IX (1933), 573-575.

¹³Minnie M. Brashear, Mark Twain Son of Missouri, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1934), p. 28.

average of the area. Marion County, in which Hannibal was located, was a college county. Hannibal itself could boast in 1852 of three academies and a percentage of illiteracy that was lower than it was almost a century later.¹⁴ Sam Clemens came from a family of readers. His father helped start the Hannibal library when Sam was nine years old.

In her study of the newspaper files of Hannibal, Miss Brashear brought to light evidence that the barrenness attributed to the town was ill-considered. The town had five newspapers, and many of the townspeople contributed to them. That the newspapers were steeped in literary culture was made evident by the Latin and Greek references Miss Brashear found, as well as accounts of Thackeray, Dickens, Hawthorne, H. B. Stowe, Daniel Webster, Mrs. Trollope, Sam Johnson, Young, Goldsmith, Pope, Burns, Sir Issac Newton, Cowper, and Gray.¹⁵ A rough idea of what might have been obtained in the local bookstores is given by an advertisement found in the Western Union of May 15, 1851:

MORE NEW BOOKS

Just received from New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Louisville, and St. Louis, an extensive assortment of books and stationery, embracing histories, biography,

¹⁴Brashear, op. cit., pp. 198-207.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 143.

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BOOKS AND BOOKS

Just received from New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Louisville, and St. Louis, an extensive assortment of books and stationery, embracing history, biography,

¹⁴ Erbe, op. cit., pp. 188-207.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 143.

poems, miscellanies, Latin, French, and Greek books, scientific works--a great variety of moral and religious books--in short, every article usually kept in the best book stores, all of which will be sold very cheap for cash, wholesale or retail...¹⁶

Although she makes no attempt to discredit DeVoto's assertion that the religion of the frontier was Evangelism rather than Puritanism, Miss Brashear recognizes the value of the Puritan religion. A strong religion was needed, she insisted, to lift a society out of ruffianism; Puritanism supplied the need and was largely supported.¹⁷ Then, too, it gave Mark Twain a thorough knowledge of the Bible by the time he was fifteen, a knowledge that was to be used in much of his later writings.

She mentions Mark Twain's own recognition of the value of Hannibal some sixty years later when he was in India. He wrote in a letter, "All that goes to make the ME in me was in a Missourian village on the other side of the globe."¹⁸

Thus when Sam left Hannibal to make his fortune he was well prepared to go abroad in the world. His background of book knowledge had been supplied by the bookstores and libraries. He had worked in a printing office, and he had been nurtured by a family interested in literature.

¹⁶Brashear, op. cit., p. 201.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 254.

¹⁸Loc. cit.

Following Brashear chronologically, Edward Wagenknecht seems to be in essential agreement with her, for he reviews the various cultural insitutions that existed in Hannibal and concludes that "Mark Twain was not quite the child of the wilderness he has sometimes been represented to have been."¹⁹

It was not until almost a decade later than Hannibal received new treatment. DeLancey Ferguson pointed out that just as Brooks went too far in denying culture to Hannibal, it was just as erroneous to attribute too much culture to the town. He argued that the ablest clergy rarely reached the frontier, and that when they did, their stay was not long. Then too, there were were certain aspects of culture that were completely absent. Such things as architecture, orchestral music, and illustration²⁰ were simply non-existent.

William C. S. Pellowe, writing in 1945, does not attempt to explain away the Calvinism of Hannibal. Instead he argues, as Miss Brashear did, that the frontier towns needed a strong religion to stand up against the orgies of drunkenness and dissolution, profanation of religion, etc. Strong religion was responsible for much of the education, and for the gradual weeding out of lawlessness. It hardly seems possible, contends

¹⁹Edward Wagenknecht, Mark Twain, The Man And His Work, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1935), p. 8.

²⁰DeLancey Ferguson, Mark Twain Man And Legend, (Indianapolis, Indiana, Bobbs Merrill and Co., 1943)pp.25-8.

Pellowe, that if Hannibal were so wild and lawless, as Brooks had contended, one would have found the following advertisement in the Hannibal Journal of August 3, 1848:

YOUNG LADIES SEMINARY

The Rev. I. D. Lea will open a school exclusively for young ladies in the Lecture Room of the Presbyterian Church on the first Monday in September. He designs to afford all the advantages requisite in pursuit of a substantial, thorough and polite education, including Orthography, Reading, Writing Grammar, ancient and modern Geography, History, Arithmetic, Mathematics, Logic, Rhetoric, Natural, Mental and Moral Philosophy, Chemistry, and Astronomy. Extra charge for the Latin Language.

.
He has made arrangements with a competent instructress that any scholar wishing to take lessons in Piano and music can have that privilege at the usual rates for that branch.²¹

Thus we seem to have reached a position that is quite far removed from that of Van Wyck Brooks' original contention that Hannibal was a desert of human sand, completely lacking in culture, and that its influence was such that it laid the foundation of what was to be a life of misspent energies. It remains to be seen in subsequent chapters in this study if the critics have been as destructive to Brooks' other assertions. It is of interest that for some eleven years the critics followed the Brooksian line as regards Hannibal, and evidently made little effort to investigate sources on the frontier.

²¹William C. S. Pellowe, Mark Twain Pilgrim from Hannibal, (New York, Hobson Book Press, 1945), p. 27.

This use of second-hand material seems to have been one of the major drawbacks in obtaining a valid biographical study of Mark Twain.

* * * * *

Of all the elements of Hannibal that affected Mark Twain adversely, Brooks attributes the most damaging influence to Jane Clemens, for it was her Calvinistic conviction that instilled mortal terror into the boy, giving him constant fear of retribution and providing the firm ground-work for a later belief in predestination. Thus a large share of the failure to satisfy his inner drive was traced to her inability to understand her weak, sensitive child. Her womanly kindness may have extended to warming the water she used for drowning kittens, but she was also the "Madonna of the hairbrush"²² when it came to her children.

Such is Brooks' picture but it takes on a more sordid aspect when he interprets the scene that Paine recorded of the death of young Sam's father, John Clemens. John died young in age, but old in spirit, for he had suffered the mental torture of frequent defeat as well as perennial illnesses. At his father's coffin Sam was made to promise to be true to his

²² Brooks, op. cit., p. 35.

mother, to be industrious, and not to break her heart. Because of Sam's somnambulations which continued for a few nights following this scene, Brooks concluded that here was the turning point of Mark Twain's life, that from this time forward, "his will is definitely opposed to his essential instinct."²³

Harvey O'Higgins and Edward H. Reade in 1924 found the Brooksonian interpretation quite acceptable. They agreed that Jane's emphasis was on goodness rather than love, that she was responsible for Sam's Puritan anxiety, by constantly repressing him. This repression stimulated him to humor, they felt. O'Higgins and Reade carried their interpretation of the coffin scene further than Brooks. They found that Jane impressed Sam with the idea that death represents guilt, and that he was to experience this sense of guilt throughout his life, especially at the deaths of his brother Henry, and his children, Langdon and Susy. He was constantly reminded by his conscience that he was not fulfilling his familial duties. His later mechanistic philosophy, they conclude, was a direct outcome of his inability to escape this everpresent feeling of guilt.²⁴

²³ Brooks, op. cit., p. 42.

²⁴ Harvey O'Higgins and Edward H. Reade, The American Mind in Action, (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1924), pp. 26-49.

It was but a year later, in 1925, that Doris and Samuel Webster saw fit to answer Brooks and his followers. They argue that no one is completely consistent except a fanatic, a term that could hardly be applied to Jane Clemens. She was more liberal than Puritan. Her granddaughter never heard her mention Calvinist retribution during twenty-five years Jane lived in her house. Jane hardly ever went to church all the while she lived in St. Louis. Her interests lay more in the unusual. She occasionally went to the Jewish synagogue and was interested in spiritualism. She loved parades, the theatre, spectacles, and gaiety. She was lively and emotional, not in the least morbid. Her interest in funerals was simply to insure a large attendance at her own. Besides, in her early days in Tennessee, funerals were social events. Due to the expense of a preacher, the surviving families would wait until several people had died before having the funeral ceremony. Jane's sense of humor never waned, and she rarely needed coaxing to dip into her inexhaustible supply of stories. O'Higgins and Reade had found in her endless war on flies "the peculiarity of a mind morbidly expiating a hidden cruelty." This, the Websters feel, is simply using a detective story²⁵ trick of making the character fit the crime.

DeVoto sought to remove the very foundations from Brooks'

²⁵Doris and Samuel Webster, "Whitewashing Jane Clemens", Bookman, (New York), LXI (1925), 531-535.

theory of the turning point of Mark Twain's life by arguing that it was based on the probably erratic memories of an old man; for, when Mark Twain gave Paine much of the information of his early life, he had reached a stage where his imagination often seemed more real than reality itself. DeVoto suggests an incident that Mark Twain had recalled some three years after the one used by Brooks. This event that DeVoto uses occurred in 1909 and was included in What Is Man? as the turning point in Mark Twain's life. It was the incident of the measles epidemic, when Sam was so afraid that he might catch the disease that he climbed into the bed of a friend who had it, in order to stop the nerve-racking uncertainty. He caught the disease and nearly died, but once well, he was removed from school and apprenticed to a printer. "I became a printer and began to add one link after another to the chain which was to lead me into the literary profession."²⁶

The importance of this episode lies in its shattering effect on the Brooksonian edifice. Brooks had made the incident at Sam's father's bedside the cornerstone of his thesis. The fact that Mark Twain's memory was undependable when he related the incident to his biographer is in itself an important consideration in lessening the value of Brooks' foundation stone. When DeVoto pointed out that Mark Twain had three years later

²⁶DeVoto, op. cit., p. 85.

referred to a totally different incident as the turning point in his life, the trauma on which so much of Brooks' thesis depended assumed little more interpretative value than a pipe-dream.

Newton Arvin, who reviewed DeVoto's book, found that DeVoto was too eager to discount Brooks and his school, and that in his eagerness he had overlooked important evidence. DeVoto had attempted to minimize the Puritan element, whereas Brooks had stressed it. To support his contention that Brooks was right Arvin quotes Mark Twain, who said in his autobiography, "Mine was a Presbyterian conscience and knew but the one duty-- to hunt and harry its slave upon all pretexts and on all occasions, particularly when there was no reason for it."

Arvin accuses DeVoto of simplifying the whole problem, and then, as a thoroughly indoctrinated disciple of Brooks, he points out the "petty bourgeois religiosity of his (Mark Twain's) mother and his wife" as insidious in its effect on an unstable spirit. "Probably the annals of literature do not contain another equally tragic instance of a highly endowed artist debauched and demoralized to a point where his very integrity is lost by the infection of crude avarice."²⁷

Miss Brashear admits that a certain amount of austerity

²⁷ Newton Arvin, "Mark Twain Simplified", The New Republic, LXXII (1932), 211-212.

existed in the Clemens household, but that although the family²⁸ was not demonstrative, they did have affection for one another. Although Brooks stressed the lack of maternal love, he made no mention of the gaiety and charm of Sam's mother, who was as lively as a sixteen year-old. She was a woman of broad humanity, and hated dullness.²⁹ Admittedly Sam had a devastating conscience; part of it was doubtless due to his Presbyterian upbringing, but more of it was due to his artistic sensitivity. His mother never exercised upon the children an unwholesome discipline. From her he derived his taste for life and his³⁰ deep interest in people.

The similarity of temperament displayed by Sam and his mother was felt by Wagenknecht to be an important consideration in understanding the strong influence Jane Clemens had upon her son. But strong as was the influence of mother upon son, it was not nearly so narrowing as some critics have claimed. She had courage, curiosity and unconventionality and a trick³¹ of coloring fact with fiction. As for calling the measles incident a death wish as did O'Higgins and Reade, Wagenknecht³² dismisses such a Freudian interpretation as "asinine."

²⁸Brashear, op. cit., pp. 93-94.

²⁹Ibid., p. 83.

³⁰Ibid., p. 84.

³¹Wagenknecht, op. cit., p. 9.

³²Ibid., p. 89 n.

A new insight into the value of the coffin scene, as Brooks interpreted it, was given in 1938 when Benson pointed out a statement by Mark Twain's biographer that Mark Twain did not have a definite literary ambition even at the age of twenty five. Benson concludes:

.....harnessing such a rigid pattern on a little boy of eleven....would seem illogical. And yet here the little fellow is supposedly doomed to a tragic life of frustration because a story, which he himself contradicted and which possibly is not true in most of its details, got itself written into a biography. The whole complex analysis is pretty discouraging to little boys.³³

There is in Ferguson's treatment of the measles incident another plea for treating children as children and not as adults. When motives are sought, it should be realized that children will have the motives of children. Thus when young Sam jumped into friend Will Bowen's sick-bed to catch the measles, it could not have been a death wish that impelled the action. There was a certain pride in being able to boast that one had survived the disease, and since most of the other children in the town were going through the ordeal, Sam also wanted to catch it. He did not want to be regarded as a sissie. Ferguson concludes, "All the episode really proves³⁴ is that Sam Clemens was normal."

In 1943 Pellowe was quite indignant about the whole

³³Ivan Benson, Mark Twain's Western Years, (Palo Alto, California, Stanford University Press, 1938), pp. 2-4.

³⁴John DeLancey Ferguson, Mark Twain Man and Legend, (Indianapolis, Indiana, Bobbs Merrill and Company, 1943), p. 30.

treatment of Jane Clemens. He was at a loss to see austerity in a woman who "mixed fun with her discipline and laughter with her Calvinism."³⁵ He offered the testimony of the children who, looking back to their childhood, felt that their mother had not been unusually severe in her family management. Pellowe saw little truth in Brooks' picture of her as a

kind, wan, worn, desperately optimistic, fanatically energetic mother...always scolding him, comforting him, punishing and pleading with him..impressing upon him for all time that woman is the inevitable seat of authority and the fount of wisdom.

Pellowe disputes Brooks' statement that Jane was worn and wan. He finds such a description inconsistent with her eighty-year life span. Pellowe also finds no truth in Brooks' assertion that Jane tried to feminize her son. There was surely³⁶ nothing feminine about Mark Twain.

Pellowe's objection extends to Brooks' criticism of Jane's lack of worldly experience. He argues that even if Jane had been more worldly, she would not necessarily have made Mark Twain a greater man. Instead of criticizing her, says Pellowe, Brooks should have complimented her for keeping the family together after John's death, for making them industrious and saving them from the "ever-present disasters of drunkenness, gambling and general brutality." Then too, a look into the

³⁵Pellowe, op. cit., p. 36.

³⁶Ibid., p. 60.

customs of the times would have shown Brooks that a child making a promise at the death-bed of a parent was not unusual.³⁷

So much has been said against Calvinism that Pellowe offers the suggestion that there was much good in it as well, which critics seem to have overlooked. It made good parents who worked hard for their children's education; it built schools in the wilderness, attacked lawlessness, made medical advances, and gave a literature, folklore, and architecture to the West.³⁸

Pellowe found it quite useless to speculate on what might have been. As has been mentioned in Chapter One, Brooks expounded a theory of how Mark Twain might have greatly improved if Jane Clemens had been a different woman, one more able to nourish the genius of her child and reduce the dependence on others that was his failing for the rest of his life. Pellowe brings out the error in such reasoning when he agrees that she might have been a better parent if she had belonged to the Parent-Teachers Association or some cultural society, but that if Brooks' speculation is followed, Washington might have been a better president and Napoleon and Hitler would not have been so barbaric. "Perhaps Mr. Brooks, in his attempt to explain The Ordeal of Mark Twain is only compensating for some

³⁷ Pellowe, op. cit., p. 62.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 64.

frustration his own mother wrought in him."³⁹

According to Brooks, O'Higgins and Masters, continues
Pellowe,

.....if Jane Clemens had carried her child for a normal nine months instead of seven, if she had only loved the boy instead of showing her dislike by laughing at him, if she had kept him at school instead of apprenticing him to a printer in his early teens, if she had only read popular books instead of the Bible, if she had read Rousseau instead of John Bunyan, if she had urged him to drink, smoke, gamble, swear and practice loose virtue, if she had held the twelve-year-old boy in her arms all night in a rocking-chair instead of making him go back to bed after walking in his sleep, if she had never taken him to church on Sundays but had turned him loose to swim in the river all day, if she had kissed her husband a little more in front of the children, if she could have prevented him from chastising the children when they disobeyed his commands, if she could have prevented his taking that walk to Palmyra in the rain which resulted in his taking cold and dying, if she could have spirited his body out of the house so that the children would not have known their father was dead, if she had not talked with a drawl that was so amusing that Sammy imitated her and got to be a cut-up in front of the other children, if she could have headed off the inferiority in that boy so that he would never have any fears-----then Samuel L. Clemens would have developed into a truly great literary man and would have written real books and not trifles like Huckleberry Finn, A Connecticut Yankee and Innocents Abroad (books that Messrs. Brooks, O'Higgins and Masters could themselves out-write any day, and we hope are going to write some day and thus put Mark Twain in the shade); yes, he would have written books that these men are sure everybody would have liked a hundred times more than those he did write, books that by their satire would have saved American destiny where Henry Ward Beecher and a hundred thousand preachers plus novelists of vast educational background, plus mighty giants of culture in the Universities had failed to save it. But as things turned out, America went its way from the Gilded Age to the Tarnished

³⁹Pellowe, op. cit., p. 67.

Age to the Rusty Age and there is no hope for the lost people-----all because Mark Twain did not write better books of humor and satire and revolt. And why did he not do better? The answer is Jane Clemens. She is the reason the nation got lost. Is it not heartbreaking? Is this not the most tragic event in the nineteenth century? If true we all ought to weep. If true Messrs. Brooks, O'Higgins and Masters ought to weep with us.⁴⁰

* * * * *

In this chapter it has been shown that for more than a decade following The Ordeal Of Mark Twain, many influential critics agreed with Brooks in regard to the formative influences on Mark Twain and their effect on his future. Lewis Mumford, Lucy Lockwood Hazard, Fred Lewis Pattee, and Vernon Louis Parrington all made the same error. They were satisfied to accept the picture that Brooks had drawn. They did not question the view that Hannibal and its environs were poor soil on which to sow the seed of genius. Brooks had used what appeared to be authoritative sources. Among his references he had cited E. W. Howe, who depicted the desolate frontier in The Story of a Country Town; Hamlin Garland, whose autobiography, A Son of the Middle Border, pictured the slavelike life of the farmer and the sordid monotony of the pioneer; and Edith Wharton, who in Ethan Frome set forth a grim picture of unhappiness on, of all places, a bleak Massachusetts farm. (What bearing fictional Massachusetts could have on actual conditions in Hannibal is

⁴⁰Pellowe, op. cit., pp. 69-73.

beyond comprehension.) But these first-decade critics did not bother to investigate the conditions that really existed in Hannibal.

The first critic to study the frontier sources thoroughly was Bernard DeVoto, who in 1932 found conditions completely different from the Brooksian representation. The Ordeal of Mark Twain, as DeVoto saw it, was inaccurate in every respect, and the analysis Brooks had made was worthless. DeVoto found a rich folk culture on the frontier, and he saw no evidence of the sex repression which Brooks and his followers had stressed.

Miss Minnie M. Brashear went still further than DeVoto. Her conclusion was that Hannibal was the most favorable place in America for Mark Twain's birth and early development. Her study of Hannibal's culture during the first half of the nineteenth century showed that the Hannibal of Mark Twain's youth was on a higher plane culturally than most Missouri towns of today.

The major critics who followed DeVoto and Miss Brashear have been in essential agreement with them on the subject of the frontier. DeLancey Ferguson, was afraid, however, that too much culture had been attributed to Hannibal. This he showed by pointing out the areas of culture that did not exist in the town. Still it is hard to visualize a better Mark Twain because of an early exposure to fine architecture or orchestral music.

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The religious aspect of the frontier received a thorough-

going treatment by William Pellowe, who showed that a firm religion accounted for much of the civilizing process of the rough frontier. It fostered moral decency and education; Hannibal might have been a barren spot indeed, if it had not been for Calvinism.

The one element of the frontier to which Brooks had attributed the most damaging influence on Mark Twain was Jane Clemens, who, Brooks said, repressed her son with her narrow Presbyterian beliefs in retribution and responsibility. Brooks had found the most damaging factor in Sam's relations with his mother to be the promise she extracted from her son at the death of her husband. This incident received even more highly speculative treatment at the hands of O'Higgins and Reade. These flights of fancy were rudely upset by an article written by Doris and Samuel Webster. By using the statements of people actually associated with Jane Clemens, they revealed her as a liberal, good-natured, humorous, lively person of wide interests and an inexhaustible supply of stories.

But it was DeVoto who removed the ground from under Brooks' cornerstone, the coffin incident, by showing how erratic was Mark Twain's memory when he related the story to his biographer.

Aside from Newton Arvin, who used a weak and vague defense, the critics of the past sixteen years have concurred in a repudiation of the Brooksian thesis as it concerned Jane Clemens. Miss Brashear found fine qualities handed down from

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mother to son and Wagenknecht agreed with her. Benson scoffed at the interpretation of the coffin scene (if indeed it ever occurred). Ferguson pleaded that children not be burdened with adult motives. Fellowe put the finishing touches to what was already Brooks' lost cause by applying fine satire to the fallacious reasoning Brooks had used.

Thus today Brooks' treatment of Mark Twain's Hannibal years stands condemned. With the foundation of his thesis so thoroughly demolished, it is not difficult to anticipate what critics have done to the rest of his edifice.

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CHAPTER III

THE WEST: MINER, REPORTER AND HUMORIST

When at the age of nineteen Sam Clemens left home to seek his fortune, he went East for a few years before his arrangement with Horace Bixby for his training as a river-boat pilot. Brooks insists that Jane added to her son's repression by extracting a promise from him, when he left home, not to drink or play cards. It has been noted by subsequent critics that, although Brooks failed to mention it, she released him from his promise after he became a pilot. It has also been argued that such a promise did him much more good than harm, by preventing him from falling in with bad company and thereby imperilling his future.

It is Brooks's idea that by becoming a pilot on the Mississippi Mark Twain was satisfying both of his conflicting selves. The high wages that came with such a position fulfilled his "will," which demanded that he make good financially so as to be faithful to his mother by contributing to the family income. The freedom of having to be subservient to no one was like the independence of the artist.

Mark Twain mentioned in "Old Times on the Mississippi" that the only permanent ambition among the boys of his town was to be a steamboatman, and in the hierarchy of steamboatmen the position of pilot was the most princely. Brooks does not mention this ambition. Perhaps he did not include it because

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it shows that it was possible for Mark Twain to have become a pilot without the necessity of having a split personality.

It was while he was a pilot that his brother, Henry, was accidentally killed in a steamboat explosion. Sam felt responsible for Henry's death. The incident received no elaboration by Brooks, though it was considered quite significant by a German critic writing three years later. Friedrich Schönmemann found herein the mainspring of Mark Twain's later pessimism, for the tragedy of his young brother shattered his faith in life. He was to go through a series of tragic deaths of loved ones, and each death was to have a debilitating effect upon him.¹

The Civil War cut short his piloting career. The forced break in his career was interpreted by Brooks as being additional groundwork for Mark Twain's later mechanistic philosophy. The fateful change was felt more acutely because, after leaving the river he went west with his brother Orion, and there in Nevada, in what Brooks mistakenly calls the "gold fields," he compromised his artistic self by becoming a journalist.

His giving up of the immaculate dress of the pilot to wear clothes even more disreputable than those of the miners indicated to Brooks that Mark Twain had surrendered his pride and his individuality.² But Brooks is somewhat inconsistent

¹Friedrich Schönmemann, Mark Twain als Litterische Persönlichkeit, (Verlag der Frommannschen Buch Handlung, Jena, 1926), p. 20.

²Brooks, The Ordeal of Mark Twain, p. 74.

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when he asserts later in his book that the many practical jokes played on Mark Twain were an effort to suppress his individuality. For since individuality was not tolerated in Virginia City,³ how could one lose a quality that was already lost?

Mark Twain failed at mining, Brooks contends, because he did not care for money. The artist in him objected, as it did consistently in later years when he was a businessman. But being faced with the problem of providing for his mother, he had to compromise the artist in him by accepting a position as a reporter on the Virginia City Territorial Enterprise. His indecision was so great at the prospect of this step that he spent a week walking in the wilderness. He covered one hundred and thirty miles fighting his battle alone, before he decided to take the job. Brooks comments that for the rest of his life he regretted having taken the step that set him permanently in the role of humorist. It was this chagrin that made him take the pseudonym Mark Twain, which, Brooks asserts, is significant in that it meant "safe water" in river parlance.⁴ It was a protection from the odium of literary life". Nor was Mark Twain happy when the Jumping Frog of Calaveras County was acclaimed in the East; for he wrote to his mother, "To think

³Brooks, op. cit., p. 78.

⁴Ibid., p. 80-86.

that after writing many an article a man might be excused for thinking tolerably good, those New York people should single out a villainous backwoods sketch to compliment me on." Thus⁵ it is Brooks' contention that Mark Twain was unhappy at being recognized as a humorist rather than as an artist; that perhaps he realized that from this point forward the public would accept him only as a humorist and there was no turning back, no longer any possibility of fulfillment as an artist.

As early as 1923 Schönemann attacked the basis of the Brooksian concept. Schönemann contended that Mark Twain was much greater than America seemed to realize, not only as a man, but also as an artist. Discounting the force that impelled Mark Twain to make money, Schönemann asserted that Mark Twain merely drifted into mining and business, that he was not a professional money maker, but rather a many-sided personality, and he was made to suffer for it. He had achieved freedom as a pilot and maintained his freedom in the mining country. Becoming a journalist was good for him, for without it he could not have become the polished writer he was. It was impossible to understand him as a writer if one underestimated the journalistic aspect of his writing. As Schönemann saw it, his jesting, his humor, and satire were mingled in his work from the start, while Brooks, in contrast, asserted that while Mark Twain was out West, satire was as

⁵Brooks, op. cit., p. 88.

impossible for him as murder. Schönemann added that upon examination one finds a serious note in the humor, a forboding⁶ of his later pessimism, for he disliked being merely a clown.

By 1930 there was still no major American critic who seriously contested Brooks' position regarding the Mark Twain of Keokuk, Virginia City, and San Francisco. Vernon Louis Parrington, who seems to have found little fault with Brooks' thesis at this point, interpreted Mark Twain's week in the wilderness as a fight with himself not to accept another form of exploitation for the purpose of acquiring wealth. He agreed with Brooks that the inner artist, "the chivalrous lover of justice, the simple child puzzled at life . . . was already⁷ plotting treason against the exploiting Mark Twain."

Following Parrington, Russell Blankenship and Constance Rourke found that Mark Twain was a humorist but not a social satirist. This, however, was a sin of the age and not the fault of Mark Twain; Blankenship felt that in addition to the age, Mark Twain's family also limited him, but that it was not until the success of The Jumping Frog that it became almost impossible for him to live down his reputation and produce⁸ anything but humor.

⁶Schönemann, op. cit., pp. 15-27.

⁷Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, Vol. III, (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1930), p. 93.

⁸Blankenship, op. cit., pp. 457-464.

In 1932 DeVoto continued to stress the argument that Mark Twain was a humorist and that it was senseless to try to read anything further into the man. Not only did he never become anything but a humorist, he did not want to be anything else.⁹ But, DeVoto maintained, it was impossible for Brooks to understand this because Brooks himself lacked humor. Mark Twain's humor to Brooks was merely Mark Twain's avoiding his duty as an artist.¹⁰ DeVoto did not see Mark Twain regretting that fate had taken him West from his happy piloting days. Mark Twain was now free, free from the endless routine of piloting and bound on a glorious adventure. The gladness and freedom he experienced on his way out West, made the blood dance in his veins. But luck did not come Mark Twain's way when he was in the silver country, and, in 1862, he accepted a position on the Virginia City Enterprise. He spent a week walking in the rough, uninhabited country before accepting the job. This hike has received various interpretations. Paine felt that after having failed as a miner, he went off by himself to decide whether to stay with mining or accept the new venture. Brooks explained this walk as the resolving of Mark Twain's inner conflict, a conflict between the desire to be an artist

⁹ Bernard DeVoto, "The Matrix of Mark Twain's Humor", Bookman, LXXIV (1931), 178.

¹⁰ Bernard DeVoto, Mark Twain's America, (Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1932), p. 236.

and the need to make money for his mother. He compromised himself by becoming a humorist. DeVoto simply found Mark Twain¹¹ trying to save stage fare. That Paine, Brooks, and DeVoto did not make the most logical interpretation of this incident was pointed out by a later critic. (See p. 60)

Mark Twain was completely happy in Virginia City, for his letters home "boundlessly express his contentment." It was¹² here that his writing took permanent shape. Here began his use of fantasy, burlesque and satire. His use of a pseudonym was not unusual for pseudonyms were being used by the whole school of American humor at the time. The problem of The Jumping Frog letter is dispatched with the speculation that perhaps Mark Twain was dissatisfied because the East had not selected some work he had written before The Jumping Frog.

Newton Arvin's highly critical review of DeVoto's Mark Twain's America found DeVoto astray on the subject of humor. It would be indeed stretching the meaning of the word to include The Prince and The Pauper, The Mysterious Stranger, or¹³ Joan of Arc as humor, argued Arvin. Here Arvin was right, but there were other non-humorous works as well.

Writing two years later, Wagenknecht found he could go

¹¹ DeVoto, op. cit., p. 120.

¹² Ibid., p. 127.

¹³ Newton Arvin, "Mark Twain Simplified", New Republic LXXII (1932), 211.

part of the way with Brooks. Certainly the age was at fault to expect Mark Twain to play the part of the fool, but "any self-respecting writer would become impatient of being considered merely a fun maker." It is also normal for a writer to tend "to respect most highly the things that he cannot do himself." This was borne out in a letter Mark Twain wrote in which he said he preferred The Prince and the Pauper to Tom Sawyer because it contained no humor, "You know a body always enjoys seeing himself out of his line," he wrote.¹⁴ No, it was not necessary to have a seriously divided soul to want to write more than humor.

Wagenknecht felt that Brooks had gone too far in asserting that Mark Twain's growth was warped by becoming a humorist. It must be realized, Wagenknecht argued, that in his early humor, Mark Twain was no different from other frontier humorists, and they cannot all have wanted to be a Rabelais or a Shelley. No, concluded Wagenknecht, Mark Twain's joining the Enterprise simply indicates his acknowledgment of failure in practical life.¹⁵

The western phase of Mark Twain's life was given detailed consideration three years later by Ivan Benson in his Mark

¹⁴Edward Wagenknecht, Mark Twain the Man and His Work, (New Haven, Yale University Press), p. 72.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 70.

part of the way with books, describing the way to fail
 to expect Mark Twain to play the part of the fool, but "any
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 to find "a respect most likely in the things that he can do
 himself." This was done out in a letter Mark Twain wrote
 which he said he preferred to write to the papers to
 have been published contained no such "how now a how
 now" as he said himself out of his line, "as was, it was
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 Wagonmaster felt that "books had gone too far in assert-
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 It must be realized, Wagonmaster argued, that in his early
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 fool. For, as Wagonmaster said, Mark Twain's joining the
 profession of humorist was the necessary result of failure in
 the other line."
 The famous phrase, "Mark Twain's life was given to the
 constitution three years later by Ivanhoe in his work

is known as "Wagonmaster," Mark Twain in the end of his work,
 (New Haven, Yale Univ. Press, p. 15).
 1841, p. 10.

Twain's Western Years. He found Mark Twain not just a humorist:

"...during this period he became an accomplished social satirist, and with a gradually broadening scope, he wrote artistically with a variety of effects, from the coarsest burlesques to fine descriptive and informative articles.¹⁶

Benson also discounted any warping of the personality or other abnormality that had been attributed to Mark Twain by the Brooksian school. Mark Twain did, however, have a wanderlust, an urge to see and experience new and different things, that
17
kept him ever on the move.

His adoption of the frontier dress showed a ready adaptability and not, as Brooks said, a repression of the artist by the pressure of the environment. Nor was there anything unusual in Mark Twain's desire to strike it rich, for thousands of other perfectly normal young men had done the same thing. As far as Benson could see, Mark Twain lacked the mother complex that Brooks had claimed drove him to seek wealth as a fulfillment of his promise. His letters home were rough,
18
normal, full of incident and humor.

Benson included in his book the letter that Mark Twain wrote to his brother Orion upon his departure from Esmeralda:

Now I shall leave at midnight tonight, alone and on foot for a walk of sixty or seventy miles through a totally unhabited country, and it is barely possible that mail

¹⁶Ivan Benson, Mark Twain's Western Years, (Palo Alto, California, Stanford University Press, 1938), p. vii.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 23.

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17 Ibid., p. 23.

18 Ibid., p. 23.

facilities may prove infernal 'slow' during the few weeks I expect to spend out there. But do you write Barstow that I have left here for a week or so, and in case he should want me he must write me here or let me know through you.

The letter points out an inaccuracy of DeVoto, who said that Mark Twain was walking to save transportation fare.¹⁹

Brooks had expressed the conviction that the rough conditions in the mining fields ruined Mark Twain's artistic sensibilities. Benson, arguing that Brooks was simply padding his theory, cited DeVoto's picture of the Mississippi River with the:

squalid venery of the steamboats which were consistently a habitation for the loves of travelers, river rats and frontiersmen. Harlots, of all degree, New Orleans courtesans in the grand manner as well as broken-down yaller gals no longer useful to the river-dives, were habitues of the boats. They and their pimps and all the machinery of bought protection, of display and sale, of robbery and murder were a constant in the trade. . . . (There were also) the skin games, the frauds, the robberies, the gambling, the cozenage, the systematic organization of the sucker trade....²⁰

Benson concluded that after four years of piloting on this Mississippi River, Mark Twain's artistic sense should have been sufficiently hardened not to be adversely affected by the roughness of the Washoe.²¹

Nor did Mark Twain degrade himself by turning journalist.

¹⁹Benson, op. cit., p. 28.

²⁰DeVoto, Mark Twain's America, p. 110.

²¹Benson, op. cit., p. 62.

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. . . .writing for a newspaper as powerful and as honest as the Enterprise, Clemens developed those qualities which were inherent in him. It was the first real opportunity he had enjoyed to express himself freely against sham, hypocrisy, humbug. He fitted easily and naturally into the Enterprise fraternity.²²

As did most of the major critics, Benson attempted a refutation of Brooks' argument on the subject of the pseudonym "Mark Twain". After admittedly doing much research among the files of frontier publications, he found literary material which led him to the conclusion that the authors used pen-²³ names because they took pride in authorship.

Benson also had an interpretation of the unusual way that Mark Twain reacted to the Eastern acclaim of The Jumping Frog. He believed that Mark Twain was angry at not having been able to get book publication for it. This was, however, a temporary attitude, because later on Mark Twain was quite proud of the story and used it as the title of his first book. Benson's reasoning, in the light of the letter Mark Twain wrote his mother regarding its reception, seems faulty.

Despite the contentions of some earnest-minded critics, argued DeLancey Ferguson in 1943, Samuel Clemens believed a pseudonym to be a primary requisite for a humorist. He had at least two pseudonyms, Josh and Thomas Jefferson Snodgrass,

²²Benson, op. cit., p. 71.

²³Ibid., pp. 79-80.

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²³Ibid., pp. 78-80.

before he happened upon Mark Twain.

At this point it may be well to recall that most of the critics have their own ideas as to why the pseudonym Mark Twain was adopted. There does appear to be one other reason which does not seem to have been mentioned, and this is that humorists could induce laughter more easily if they used humorous pseudonyms that were always associated with their product. It was the job of the humorist to create laughter; if his name was funny, so much the better. Many of the pseudonyms of humorists of the mid-nineteenth century sound funny even today. Mark Twain used other pseudonyms to insure anonymity when he wrote his serious work. He realized that people reading Joan of Arc by Mark Twain would read with the expectation of finding humor and be disappointed.

The Enterprise incident seems to have had its most reasonable treatment by Ferguson. He observed that in the letter Sam wrote to his brother, Sam had planned to leave at midnight to walk in the wilderness. Ferguson felt the time element to be significant. If Sam were going off to fight it out with himself, what would be the point of leaving at midnight? It appeared to Ferguson that Sam wanted to make a last check on a possible bonanza, and it would not do to have people knowing when he left and in what direction he was headed. Slipping out

²⁴DeLancey Ferguson, Mark Twain Man and Legend, (Indianapolis, Indiana, Bobbs-Merrill and Co., 1943), p. 46.

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²⁴Delaney Ferguson, Mark Twain Man and Legend, (Indianapolis, Indiana, Bobbs-Merrill and Co., 1933), p. 48.

in the middle of the night was an obvious way of avoiding
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company.

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A review of the critical attitudes towards the Brooksonian picture of Mark Twain in the West shows much difference of opinion. Brooks' contention that Mark Twain had compromised his soul by becoming a journalist was largely discounted. It was shown, moreover, that Mark Twain, the author, grew out of Mark Twain, the journalist. His later style owed much to his earlier years of newspaper writing. Joining the Enterprise was a normal change when his attempt at mining proved to be unsuccessful. As DeVoto showed, Brooks' claim that Mark Twain was unhappy in Nevada was not borne out by the letters he sent home during this period. Nor was there any evidence that he could not endure the rough life there, for, as DeVoto further explained, Mark Twain had experienced four years of piloting on the Mississippi with its violence and its multitude of unsavory characters. After such a rigorous period, it seems hardly possible that the rough life in Nevada should have hindered his artistic sensibilities. There was a general repudiation of Brooks' idea that Sam Clemens took the pseudonym Mark Twain as a protective device, although there was little

²⁵Ferguson, op. cit., p. 75.

agreement among the critics as to why he did it.

This period in Mark Twain's life between his fame as a result of The Jumping Frog and his marriage with Olivia Langdon was such that it did not respond well to speculation. He had succeeded as a reporter, a lecturer, and an author. He had travelled abroad and across the United States. When he married Olivia Langdon, he was already thirty-five years old.

CHAPTER IV

"THAT SIMPLE DELILAH"

Mark Twain's marriage with Olivia Langdon, according to Brooks, was a fatal mistake; she continued the ruination of the man where his mother had left off. He was a roughneck from the West and she was a highly polished member of eastern society. He looked to her for advice before his every move, for he was in her camp and anxious to do the right thing. His need for wealth was reinforced, for he had married the daughter of a wealthy coal-dealer and mine-owner of Elmira, New York. He had moved into a moneyed society and had to match the incomes of his group. He would have to continue to supply Olivia's material needs where her father had left off.

He was not to be the head of his family but still the little boy--"Youth," she called him. Olivia fitted neatly into the position vacated by Mark Twain's mother. Not only did she file off the corners of his personality to fit the Philistine mold, but she almost completely devitalized his writing as well, says Brooks. Vitality was as offensive to her as profanity. She could not distinguish between vulgarity, profanity¹ and virility. Strong language was just bad manners. Being hindered, thus, by his wife and the prudish world about him,

¹Brooks, op. cit., p. 122.

resulted in Mark Twain's surreptitious efforts at obscenity.

In Olivia's censorship of her husband's writing she was aided by William Dean Howells, whose literary ideas were largely those of the Philistine majority. The necessity of having to conform gave way gradually to the attitude of letting Olivia and Howells make the decisions. Mark Twain enjoyed being freed from the responsibility. He loved his complete subservience. When his father-in-law gave him a co-ownership of the Buffalo Express, he promised to be good and refrain from hurting those friendly toward prosperity. He kept Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven locked up in a safe for forty years before daring to publish it. He had expected the freedom to write what he pleased once he married, but his bondage was renewed and made more secure.

And so, Brooks concludes: "Marriage had been for Mark Twain's artistic conscience like the final whiff of chloroform sealing a slumber that many a previous whiff had already induced."² Olivia and her society largely completed the unmaning of Mark Twain, which treatment led to his eventual pessimism and despair.

The reviewers of The Ordeal of Mark Twain were the first to rush to the defense of Mark Twain and his wife. One would have to be a super-human genius to disregard that Elmira

²Brooks, op. cit., p. 118.

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society--but Mark Twain was not a super-human genius, argued one. Brooks failed to see the humor in Mark Twain's promise when he assumed the associate-editorship of the Buffalo Express,⁴ said another. Richard Burton, Mark Twain's Hartford neighbor, felt that Mrs. Clemens had been misrepresented. She was a devoted wife, and Mark Twain was not muzzled by her or anyone in the family. As evidence, Burton offered Mark Twain's unconventionality, in language, in dress, and in his occasional pessimism. The restraint that his wife applied saved his reputation.⁵ Brooks had made a serious mistake. Rather than criticism, Olivia Clemens deserved a debt of gratitude for the assistance she gave her husband.

Three years after Brooks, Henry Seidel Canby referred to The Ordeal of Mark Twain as an "excellent study" of the "intellectual disease which kept Mark Twain from his truest development." But most artists have to undergo a certain amount of suppression, in other countries as well as in America. If Mark Twain had not had this suppression, he would have "fizzled his life like an uncapped soda spring." To his wife

³Carl Van Doren, "The Fruits of the Frontier", The New York Nation, August 14, 1920, n.p.

⁴Alvin Johnson, "The Tragedy of Mark Twain", The New Republic, XXIII (1920), 201.

⁵Richard Burton, "The Mystery of Personality", Bookman, n.p., January, 1921.

and the Elmore society belonged the credit for having given Mark Twain the security without which he might never have ceased lecturing. Olivia did not cause his pessimism, for he already had the tendency toward high spirits which is a corollary to depression.⁶

O'Higgins and Reade, who never deviated from the Brooksonian line, found Olivia as Puritan as Mark Twain's mother, but then, they argued, the American wife is usually the "Puritan censor of the revolting male," which revolt is often disguised as humor.⁷

However, other critics of the 1920's who had agreed with Brooks on the subject of the frontier and Jane Clemens found they could not go along with him in his condemnation of Olivia and her New England society.

Mrs. Hazard felt that Brooks was trying to prove too much and that his use of this newest of approaches (Freudian psychology) merely resulted in the old cherchez la femme, blaming Olivia for Mark Twain's shortcomings.⁸

Pattee found Mark Twain's marriage and his New England circle of friends by no means the."....Delilah shears that

⁶Henry Seidel Canby, "Mark Twain", Literary Review, IV (November 3, 1923), 201-202.

⁷O'Higgins and Reade, op. cit., pp. 44-45.

⁸Lucy Lockwood Hazard, op. cit., p. 221.

robbed him of the full of his native powers. Without this saving element, he would have been merely another Joaquim Miller." His wife was responsible for that urging of his best efforts, always in the face of his "natural tendencies of drifting and ease."⁹ His New England friends also had a large share in his success. The Reverend Joseph H. Twichell suggested what became Life on the Mississippi. Howells was a constant aid. It was Warner who was responsible for The Gilded Age. When Mark Twain lost practically everything as a result of poor speculation and the failure of the Paige Typesetting Machine and his publishing company; it was Olivia and H. H. Rogers who came to his aid to help him get back on his feet and save him from the fatal mistake of bankruptcy.

To say that Mark Twain was hamstrung by the East and that as a result of his marriage he lived his later years a thwarted genius is to argue that ignorance which has a touch of genius in it should be quarantined from all contact with art and culture lest its originality be vitiated.¹⁰

General agreement among Mark Twain critics as to the influences of Olivia and the East upon Mark Twain did not begin to crystallize until the early thirties, but unfavorable criticism of the Brooksonian concept seemed to be taking a more definite shape. At the turn of the first decade following

⁹Fred Lewis Pattee, "On the Rating of Mark Twain", American Mercury, XIV (June, 1928), 187.

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Brooks' book, Carl Van Doren took a middle-of-the-road view of the effect of the East and Olivia on Mark Twain. She was a stabilizing influence, but his great love for her caused him to value her opinions often more highly than they deserved. No matter what she said, he loved it, nor did he rebel against Howells' restraining influence.¹¹

Further insight into the problem seems to have been exhibited by C. Hartley Grattan who, although he does not condemn Olivia for her repression nor Howells for his emasculating censorship, does not credit them with helping Mark Twain toward his best work.

(They)..trimmed his gaucheries, curbed his tendencies to burlesque and the foolishly grotesque; they tamed his exuberance so that he conformed to the temporary mores of his time; but they were utterly incapable of guiding him to the exploitation of his strength.¹²

A temporary reversion came with Blankenship who had difficulty seeing through any of Brooks' thesis. Blankenship compared the problem of mixing the frontier spirit with the Gilded Age to mixing oil and water. Mark Twain was made by the frontier and ruined by the Gilded Age. He wanted success, and since success was measured in the East he sought money. (One might ask how success was measured in the West, say Nevada or

¹¹Carl Van Doren, Dictionary of American Biography, (New York, 1930), pp. 192-198.

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California.) Blankenship sees Mark Twain polished down to a point where much of the primitive virility of the frontier was lost. He feels that Brooks' thesis of Olivia's influencing Mark Twain to write "nice literature" lacks humor, but is none-the-less impressive. The emasculation of Mark Twain was not her fault completely, however. The Gilded Age was more responsible.¹³

Blankenship oversimplified the problem. Speaking in generalities, he takes little notice of Mark Twain's accomplishments. The supposition that Olivia and the Gilded Age weakened much of Mark Twain's primitive virility cannot stand against the fact that he produced what are considered his best books about the frontier some ten to twenty years after he settled in the East. The Gilded Age stimulated him to fight against its evils. If achieving a happy married life with Olivia affected his primitive virility there is little evidence of it.

Taking into account Mark Twain's Victorian tendencies, Ludwig Lewisohn pointed out that Mark Twain could not have loved Olivia so deeply had she shared his "ribald, blasphemous criticism of man, religion and society." He idolized "woman-kind as a keeper among rude and lawless males." This is brought out in his attraction to Joan of Arc, whom he called

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"easily and by far the most extraordinary person the human race has ever produced." Lewisohn sees no ordeal here. One is not frustrated by what one loves dearly. He may have had a temporary chafing under Olivia's "moral and literary supervision," but his yielding to both her and Howells was "with an intimate and perfect inner consent."¹⁴

Burton Rascoe, in 1932, reminded his readers that Mark Twain would not have written several of his books if Olivia and H. H. Rogers had not insisted that he pay back one hundred cents on the dollar to save his reputation rather than to go into bankruptcy. But it must be admitted that Olivia, Howells, and Rogers helped restrain his natural genius, and resenting this, he sought escape in a juvenile pessimism. Rascoe found Mark Twain prone to frequent emotional outbursts, and concluded that his wife's restraint was probably good for him, because "swearing is not an expression of ideas, it is a release of feeling." He felt that there had been no intelligent criticism of Mark Twain until C. Hartely Grattan in 1931.¹⁵ Obviously Rascoe had not done much looking.

It was DeVoto who first presented a detailed analysis of the question of Olivia's effect upon Mark Twain. He decided

¹⁴Ludwig Lewisohn, Expression in America, (Harper and Bros., New York, 1932), pp. 218-219.

¹⁵Burton Rascoe, Titans of Literature, (New York, G. B. Putnam's Sons, 1932), pp. 423-429.

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¹⁴Ludwig Lewisohn, Expression in America, (Harper and Bros., New York, 1933), pp. 218-219.
¹⁵Burton Rascoe, Titans of Literature, (New York, G. B. Putnam's Sons, 1932), pp. 433-439.

in favor of Olivia. Mark Twain rarely resented the conventional delicacies of the East and he never questioned them. Un-schooled by formal education, he came East to a static literary atmosphere and accepted with no feeling of surrender the tradition that was common in his century. But his acceptance did little to change the quality or quantity of his output. If¹⁶ anything he was stimulated by his new-found discipline. Toward the middle of the century a change in the American attitude with regard to literary crudeness became evident. Editors and publishers would not have accepted much of what Olivia deleted. DeVoto feels that the aspect of crudity and roughness in Mark Twain's writing has been given more attention than it warrants, for Mark Twain used comparatively few expressions that needed¹⁷ excision. This was to be reasserted some years later by Ferguson, who made a careful study of the Buffalo manuscript of Huckleberry Finn. (See p. 82)

Despite DeVoto's denunciation of Olivia and the New England group was launched by Stephen Leacock in 1933. He wrote, "The tradition that Howells and the Rev. Twichell and Mrs. Clemens 'made' Mark Twain is sheer nonsense. They did¹⁸ their level best to ruin his work--and failed; that's all."

¹⁶ DeVoto, Mark Twain's America, p. 206-7.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 209.

¹⁸ Stephen Leacock, Mark Twain, (New York, D. Appleton and Company, 1933), p. 64.

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¹⁶ Devoto, Mark Twain's America, p. 208-9.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 209.

¹⁸ Stephen Leacock, Mark Twain, (New York, D. Appleton
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Leacock found more people attacking his ideas than favoring them in 1933, because this was the year of the revised edition of The Ordeal of Mark Twain. Leacock, like Brooks, paid no attention to the criticism that had been written since 1920.

The reviewers of Brooks' revised edition were up in arms. Leisy in the Dallas Morning News, discussing Brooks' treatment of Olivia, went so far as to say that Mark Twain's writing could never have got into the magazines if it had not been for Olivia and Howells.¹⁹

The question of Olivia was brought under close scrutiny by Wagenknecht in 1935. The picture of her, as he saw it, was an idyllic one in the years prior to 1920, when Brooks shattered it by calling her "'that simple Delilah', who combined the forces of Puritanism and Capitalism that enslaved the soul of Mark Twain, broke his courage, plunged him at last into bitter pessimism and despair, and robbed American Literature of its rightful king-figure."²⁰ The effect of Brooks' treatment of Olivia was that now:

One may agree with Mr. Brooks or one may disagree with him. One may even disagree with him acrimoniously. The only thing one cannot do with Mr. Brooks is to ignore him. Nobody can write about Mrs. Clemens in 1935

¹⁹E. E. Leisy, Dallas Morning News, "Critics and Humorists Writing of Mark Twain Leave Much Unsaid," April 2, 1933.

²⁰Wagenknecht, op. cit., p. 166.

as he might have written in 1919. She is no longer an idyll; she is a problem.²¹

It was Mark Twain, rather than Olivia, who enjoyed the lavish hospitality which cost them so much, wrote Wagenknecht. He it was who insisted that he would rather entertain in his own home than visit other people. Then too, he needed more social life than she, and if she had not given him his way, they might have led a more simple life.²² Thus her influence was not as all-powerful as has been suggested. She did, however, fulfill the position of helpmate and advisor. Mark Twain had great potentialities, but to make them realities, he needed guidance. Wagenknecht included an incident during a tour with J. B. Pond. Olivia had advised her husband to inject a little seriousness into what she felt was a much too humorous program. The resultant change pleased Pond, who thought a definite improvement had been made.²³ But in all this Mark Twain never felt that she was nagging him, for her management was done with consummate skill. "...she was always poised, always self controlled...", and she never went too far by interfering with his ideas, whether or not they met with her approval.²⁴ That he realized his indebtedness to her is made apparent by a

²¹Wagenknecht, loc. cit.

²²Ibid., p. 160.

²³Ibid., pp. 174-175.

²⁴Ibid., p. 179.

remark Mark Twain once made to Olivia's sister,

Do you know Sue, whenever I have failed to follow the advice of Livy, to change this or that sentence or eliminate a page, I have always come to regret it, because in the end my better taste in thoughts and their expression rises up and says: You should have done as she said, she was right.²⁵

Wagenknecht admits that Olivia was conventional, and that the result was to hold back her husband when he overstepped the bounds. Wagenknecht contends, however, that Mark Twain needed this restraint. "If such regulation is subversive of some genius and destroys it, then that genius ought to live unwed."²⁶

As further proof that Mark Twain did not suffer at the so-called Puritan attack on the virility in his work, Wagenknecht explains that Mark Twain so enjoyed seeing Livy cross out these indiscretions that he wrote some in purposely. If she failed to notice something that should have been deleted, he and the children would enjoy seeing the oversight, but later he would surreptitiously cross it out anyway.

It was his nature to rely on others both from the standpoint of his own adjustment in society and to guide him in his writing. Olivia was very much interested in his well-being, and if anything he proposed were to injure him in any way, she tried to steer him away from such an action. That is why she was against What Is Man? Such a philosophy, she felt, was

²⁵Wagenknecht, op. cit., p. 181.

²⁶Loc. cit.

detrimental to his morale. But she failed to understand the artist in him. She was a conventional woman in a conventional age and she liked literature that had a conventional form like Joan of Arc and The Prince and the Pauper, whereas Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn were inferior in her estimate. Still her influence could not have been completely dominating or he could not have produced Huckleberry Finn, nor could he have ended up as a determinist. Aside from her influence, she was a good detailist, and no doubt saved the publishers much work by her deletions and corrections. Thus concludes Wagenknecht:

Whatever he would have been like had he married another woman we shall never know. But it would have been very unreasonable to expect any woman--at least any eastern American woman--of his time to do more for him than Olivia Langdon did. Very few could have done so much.²⁷

Olivia may have been a problem to Wagenknecht when he made his study, but his balanced judgment of her solved the problem for future Mark Twain critics. Wagenknecht exposed the lack of truth in Brooks' contention that Olivia had completely subjugated Mark Twain to her control, that she had stifled his character, virility, freedom, critical sight, and individuality. She may no longer be an idyll, but it is just as well, for she is now seen as a fine example of American womanhood fulfilling her position as helpmate to the best of her ability.

²⁷Wagenknecht, op. cit., pp. 182-185.

During the same year that Wagenknecht published his work on Mark Twain, Pattee contended that the East was the determining factor in Mark Twain's success. It would not stand for his being an "ephemeral journalist." It also gave him a wife who was an "inspiring influence."²⁸

When Mark Twain's Notebook was published, also in 1935, Albert Bigelow Paine, the editor, called it a book to prove that those who say Howells and Olivia restricted Mark Twain are wrong. Mark Twain did his own restricting, or had it done because he did not want to break down the conventions of his day. Actually, continued Paine, the editing done by Howells and Olivia was of great value, for Mark Twain's taste was unreliable. Much of his writing was not worth publishing. Some that was published would have served Mark Twain better if it had not been published.²⁹ Paine failed to mention, as DeVoto pointed out later, that Mark Twain hated to do his own revising; he did not have the discipline for it. One wonders how he would have fared if he had lacked an Olivia and a Howells.

The centennial of Mark Twain's birth was a particularly fruitful year in the volume of Mark Twain criticism. R. E. Ellis felt that both Boston and Olivia had had a crippling

²⁸Fred Lewis Pattee, Mark Twain (introduction), American Writers Series, (New York, American Book Co., 1935), p. 35.

²⁹Albert Bigelow Paine, Mark Twain's Notebook, (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1935), pp. ix-x.

effect on Mark Twain; but he went further, finding that this proved that Mark Twain was not as great as Ibsen. If he had been...."if he had the power of profound though, the deep analytic insight into character which mark Ibsen's work, it would have come out spite of Boston and spite of his beloved Olivia."³⁰

But Ellis focussed chief blame on the powers behind Olivia..."the cold, dull, polite, smooth Anglicized Bostonian Brahmins, the Philistines of Philosophy, the prigs of art, the undertakers of religion, who lamed and shocked Mark Twain.... they tried to make him as one of themselves" instead of helping him progress in his own way; and he allowed them, as he said, 'to comb him all to hell'.³¹

Ellis was quite right in his estimation of the analytic powers of Mark Twain, nor did Mark Twain have the patient thoroughness of a great thinker. But here again is the general criticism of the way Bostonian society treated Mark Twain, and as with so much of this same criticism of Boston, it hearkens back to Brooks, who was simply padding his theory.

In 1938 Masters, like many of Brooks' followers who seem to have read little post-Brooksian criticism as background for

³⁰R. E. Ellis, "Mark Twain," Fortnightly Review, CXXXVIII, (November, 1935), 586.

³¹Ellis, loc. cit.

their own theses, blamed Olivia for not holding her husband back to a life of simplicity so that he could produce the work his genius fitted him for. It was a case of not "plain living and high thinking" but high living and no thinking. Masters was probably dissatisfied with Brooks' comparison of Olivia to Delilah and found a more degrading reference in calling her "the Omphale of his career."³² But Masters was inconsistent; on the one hand he blames Olivia for not being able to curb Mark Twain's desire for social life, and on the other, he talks about her overpowering influence on him.

Benson's book came out in the same year and, although it was confined to the years Mark Twain spent out West, he left no doubt in the reader's mind regarding his opinion of Olivia and the East insofar as they affected Mark Twain. He concludes the book by seeing him off to the East where soon "pious Olivia Clemens could smugly polish, purify, edit her husband and his work,....where effete Boston could stare straight ahead in horror at his Whittier birthday speech, one of the finest things Mark Twain ever did."³³ Benson showed evidence of careful research and analysis in his study of Mark Twain in the West. Perhaps he would not have passed judgment so glibly with Brooksonian clichés had he made a similar examination of Mark Twain in the East.

³²Edgar Lee Masters, Mark Twain - A Portrait, (New York, Scribners and Sons), pp. 78-83.

³³Benson, op. cit., p. 153.

He was probably not aware of an article written in the same year by Max Eastman. Being a native of Elmira, New York, Eastman was situated in an excellent location to make a first-hand consideration of Olivia's early background. How did the facts support the picture Brooks had drawn? He had lumped Elmira with what he called the "up-state," conservative, stagnant, fresh water towns with their brick-and-stucco palaces. What went into the formative years of Olivia, who, in Brooks' words, "without experience, without imagination had never questioned anything,...had never been conscious of any will apart from her parents, her relatives, her friends." Eastman proposed to refute Brooks' statement that Elmira lacked moral and intellectual freedom...(was)densely provincial...imposing upon all the rest of society its own type, forcing all to submit to it or imitate it." Eastman wanted it understood that Jervis Langdon, Olivia's father, was "one of the most-uncoald-dealer-and-mine-owner-like characters that ever got ahead in business," who, when he died, left "not one voice to impeach his integrity, nor one acquaintance without regret for his going, nor one friend....not proudly heart stricken at the loss of him."

Olivia's mother was referred to in a memorial sermon as "strong and unflinching in generous courage and determination." Both parents were abolitionists and "the family purse and horse were at the service of fugitives from slavery..."³⁴

³⁴Max Eastman, "Mark Twain's Elmira," Harper's Magazine, CLXXVI (May, (1938), 621.

Eastman recalled that Thomas K. Beecher gave up chances to become leader of much greater churches than his own in Elmira. He was that "eloquent and great Beecher who at one occasion when substituting at brother Henry Ward's church called back some of the audience that began to leave when he appeared instead of Henry. He addressed them with, "Those who came to worship Henry Ward Beecher are excused. Those who wish to worship God will remain."³⁵

Thomas K. Beecher seems to have been quite liberal in the running of his church and as an individual as well. He organized games, ferreted out corruption, mixed well, had his own beer mug in a local saloon, helped found the Elmira Academy of Sciences, and once befriended a prostitute, allowing her to live in his house until she gained assurance and later married. Whenever there was a question of money for one of his projects or programs, he was always given financial aid by Jervis Langdon. Church affairs were conducted on an informal basis, providing a steady stream of activities, from a little theatre to a pool room. "Intellectually it (Elmira) was the least provincial environment to be found in all American churchdom...he rejected sectarianism--inviting any and all to his church and giving his church members free reign to go where

³⁵Eastman, op. cit., p. 622.

they chose."³⁶ Olivia's mother was just about as unorthodox as anyone in this freethinking congregation. Beecher himself, leading the group, lived and taught in a manner much more daring than The Innocents Abroad.

To find so much revolt against empty forms and conventions, so much laughing realism and downright common sense and democracy and science and reckless and humorous truth telling in these people who were, nevertheless, dedicated with moral courage to an idol, may well have given Mark Twain the possession of his deepest and best self.³⁷

Olivia's influence on Mark Twain was a refining one, for he was a "rough diamond" who courted her in a yellow duster and an old straw hat. She and the rest of her family loved humor, and so the beneficial effect which came as a result of the marriage was a mutual one. Eastman summed up the influence of Elmira on Mark Twain as a "vitally liberating one...that he actively, and with judgment as well as joy, absorbed..."³⁸

It is not evident that Max Eastman had any axe to grind other than his desire to show the fallacy of Brooks' treatment of Elmira. Brooks, on the other hand, set out to show that Elmira was so bogged down with capitalist industrialism that culture was impossible. To prove this he made no reference

³⁶Eastman, op. cit., p. 624.

³⁷Ibid., p. 628.

³⁸Ibid., p. 632.

to what existed in Elmira; he merely set off one verbal blast after another. These were aimed not only at Elmira but at all the "up-state" section of New York. Now, after Eastman's factual study of Elmira, Brooks' blasts have fizzled into mere puffs of air, and Elmira's reputation emerges unscathed. The position of Olivia's family is well clarified, and the remarkably happy wedded life of Olivia and her husband becomes more understandable.

The periodicals ran a sideline skirmish during 1938 and 1939 which threw some new light on the question of how much censorship had been brought to bear on Mark Twain by Olivia and Howells. DeLancey Ferguson went back to the original manuscript of Huckleberry Finn, admittedly Mark Twain's greatest work. Here, he thought, would be an excellent place to find out the extent of the deletions and changes, and what relation they bore to Howells and Olivia. With the exception of corrections in punctuation, Ferguson found some nine hundred alterations. But these did not represent "the excision of scathing passages of which Mrs. Clemens or Howells would disapprove (nor) the dilution of grim realism to make it meat for babies. (The alterations represented, on the contrary,) the work of a skilled craftsman" making for readability--the work of the file. There were but two or three changes that might

³⁹De Lancey Ferguson, "Huck Finn Aborning", Colophon III, Spring, 1938, p. 173.

have been made by Olivia in that they were mollifications, but they were so insignificant as to have been made by Mark Twain himself. There was one modification of 'stark-naked' to 'naked' in Huck's comment on the King in the 'Royal Nonesuch'. Another change on the same page took the sentence: 'And-but I won't describe the rest of his outfit, because it was just outrageous, although it was awful funny' and changed it to: 'And-but never mind the rest of his outfit; it was just wild, but it was awful funny'. Ferguson commented that this was probably the bawdiest passage he ever conceived for publication, and it resulted in this "ineffectual mouse."⁴⁰ There was one deletion where the Brooksonian critics may have been right. This occurred where the Duke originally called the King "you unsatisfiable, tunnel-bellied old sewer." But the foregoing changes are the only ones in the book where Ferguson saw a mollifying force at work, and he felt that the followers of Brooks ought to make the best of it. He concluded that Mark Twain was an artist of humor and not a thwarted satirist. He did not "prostitute his genius" by writing humor because of his wife. He wrote humor because he was Mark Twain.⁴¹

It was almost a year later that A. Cowie had an answer for Ferguson. Ferguson had gone to the manuscript of

⁴⁰Ferguson, op. cit., p. 179.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 180.

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⁴⁰Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 180.

Huckleberry Finn for his information, but Cowie found material of a totally opposite nature when he hunted up the manuscript of Tom Sawyer. The source of Cowie's argument was a letter written to Howells from Mark Twain on the receipt of the Tom Sawyer manuscript from Howells, who had read it and filled in marginal notes in pencil. Mark Twain wrote to Howells:

There was never a man in the world so grateful to another as I was to you day before yesterday, when I sat down (in still rather wretched health) to set myself to the dreary and hateful task of making final revision of Tom Sawyer, and discovered upon opening the package of MS that your pencil marks were scattered all along. This was splendid and swept away all labor. Instead of reading the MS, I simply hunted out the pencil marks and made the emendations which they suggested. I reduced the boy battle to a paragraph. I finally concluded to cut the Sunday School speech down to the first two sentences, leaving no suggestion of satire, since the book is to be for boys and girls. I tamed the various obscenities until I judged that they no longer carried offense.⁴²

The letter speaks for itself, but Cowie further asserted that Mark Twain did like to write the unconventional but he was simply driven to do it privately and not for publication.⁴³

Ferguson immediately replied to Cowie in a letter to the editor of American Literature in which he wrote that Cowie had made the same mistake as Brooks, that of taking an incident and raising it to the level of a crisis in a man's life. This, he argued, was a simple method of interpretation but did not

⁴²A. Cowie, "Mark Twain Controls Self--Reply to D. Ferguson," American Literature, X (January, 1939), 490.

⁴³Ibid., p. 491.

make for truth. Not criticism or biography, it was simply drama. Life could not be reduced to simple terms. The real damage of such theories was that they "furnish teachers and newspaper critics with a neat, ready-made theory which saves them the trouble of doing their own thinking."⁴⁴ Howells was allowed to revise the manuscripts, reasoned Ferguson, because of Mark Twain's uncertainty, but Mark Twain was certainly not a weak man. If, as Cowie had said, Mark Twain had had strong feelings on some matters, he would certainly have rebelled, at least on a few points. Ferguson concluded his letter by calling for an end to theorizing. He felt that scholars and critics should turn their energies to the unearthing of fresh evidence from Mark Twain's unpublished works and manuscripts.

But critics disagreed even in their agreement. DeVoto later examined the same Huckleberry Finn manuscript. He counted thirty seven mollifications mostly for the sake of good taste, reducing violence or unpleasantness. The bowdlerizations were Mark Twain's own, although he liked strong words like 'wallow', 'stench', and 'bowels' which Olivia attacked.⁴⁵ Ferguson, as was previously noted, found only two or three palliations.

⁴⁴DeLancey Ferguson, "Letter to the Editor", American Literature, XI (May, 1939), 218.

⁴⁵Bernard DeVoto, Mark Twain at Work, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1942), pp. 82-86.

Ferguson's book Mark Twain Man and Legend, came out in 1943. In it he continued to display a desire to uncover new evidence. He weighed the value of the criticism of Olivia's suppression of harsh-sounding words against her weeding out of needless detail which came about as a result of Mark Twain's intense interest in technical matters. An example of this detail is Mark Twain's five-hundred word letter to Twichell on how to strop his razor. Ferguson felt that Olivia really made no inroads on Mark Twain's ideas, and, although he made concessions to her such as Bible reading and less smoking when they were first married, even these concessions did not last long.

Yet even in their disagreement the important thing borne out by these studies of DeVoto and Ferguson is that a very small fraction of the changes were softenings. There is no evidence that the revision of the Huckleberry Finn manuscript was done by any one person, such as Howells or Olivia. Thus it may well be that Mark Twain made some of the changes himself. In some cases his squeamishness went beyond that of Olivia. There was the time he felt so guilty of the passage containing the words, "...they comb me all to hell," and the fact that neither Howells nor Olivia had noticed it, that he sent a special letter to Howells for advice. Howells later agreed that he would have it out in an instant.

In all of Mark Twain's books there is only a handful of references to sex, but this cannot be attributed to deletions

by Howells, Olivia, or Mark Twain. It is characteristic of the age in which they lived.

The latest effort to show the value of Olivia's assistance to her husband is found in Samuel Webster's Mark Twain Business Man. Webster rejected the idea that Olivia should be blamed for Mark Twain's habit of pursuing wealth. Mark Twain himself had commented on the same tendency in his cousin James Langdon. It was a habit that led Mark Twain into many ~~a~~ lawsuits, but of all the lawsuits he wanted to initiate, only a fraction ever materialized. Webster concluded ^{that} ~~but~~, due to the many lawsuits he wanted to launch, he might have landed finally in jail writing most of his books where Bunyan wrote Pilgrims' Progress, and there would have been much more second rate of Mark Twain in books than there is.

* * * * *

The subsequent critics who weighed the interpretation that Brooks had made of Olivia Clemens, followed almost the same pattern as when they considered the problem of the barrenness of Hannibal or the evils brought to bear on Mark Twain by his Calvinist mother. There were some exceptions, however, as some of Brooks' disciples tended to be sympathetic. Pattee, who misfired badly in his estimate of Hannibal, saw Olivia and her friends as indispensable help to Mark Twain. Mrs. Hazard found Brooks' treatment of Olivia a well-worn device.

Of those who refuted Brooks' interpretation of Olivia,

Wagenknecht presented what is probably the most valid and complete picture of her. He saw her as one who believed in the potentialities of her husband, but who also felt he needed help in order to pursue his best efforts; she gave him that help as well as she knew how. She understood him as did no one else and she made up for many of his weaknesses. Grattan had criticized her for not being able to appreciate her husband's best work. Wagenknecht found this to be true, but felt that she deserved no special criticism for it, for she worked for the best interest of her husband, as she knew it. Then too, it must be remembered that she and her husband concurred in their decision that The Prince and The Pauper and Joan of Arc were his best books. That they both lacked critical sight is evident today, but one wonders if Mark Twain would have done as well if his wife had been someone else.

CHAPTER V

THE GILDED AGE, THE ARTIST, AND DESPAIR

It has been shown, according to Brooks, that Mark Twain was repressed when a child, when a young man, and when he was a husband and father. His doom was sealed, however, because he lived in an age which put no value on literary work or a man's individuality. Materialism reigned and wealth was the mark of achievement. Into such a society came a young man anxious to be a success; but his inner version of success and the prevailing one of society were not the same. The inner man had dreamed of artistic accomplishment, while society saw success measured in dollars. Mark Twain accepted the standards set before him and committed himself to the soul-shattering pursuit of wealth.

After his marriage, the making of money became a passion. His schemes knew no bounds and he speculated with boyish enthusiasm. Brooks also asserted that his critical sight was blinded and his admiration of possessions and wealth was unmoved by the unscrupulousness of capitalists. Mark Twain became as a capitalist himself and numbered among his close friends several high-ranking men of wealth. He spoke from the standpoint of the majority, but his inner self, which defended justice and the little man, can be seen in his letters, especially the unmailed ones, which were used to drain off his excess wrath. He was constantly at odds with himself over these divergent points of view, and so it was impossible to produce

the studied work of an artist.

Mark Twain's whole attitude was immature and childish; with the exception of Joan of Arc, the books he wrote for love were about and for children. Until the end he rarely worked hard. He had a Niagara of energy, but he threw himself away by doing things that were much too easy for him, and as a result never took pride in or got pleasure from his work. "I never do anything or accomplish anything that lingers as a pleasant memory," he wrote. He had little more critical ability than his wife. They both thought Joan of Arc and The Prince and the Pauper the best books he had done.

Brooks pointed out the Freudian wish-fulfillment appearing in much of his later work. In Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven, Mark Twain offers a different method of judging man's value on earth. The obscure Tennessee poet Billings outranks Shakespeare because, although he received no recognition on earth, he was actually a greater poet, and in heaven there is just reward. Brooks felt that Mark Twain used the character Billings as a representation of himself in that he, Mark Twain the artist, was also not appreciated by his society.²

Becoming engrossed in business put further from him the work of the satirist. Acquisition and creation being diametrically opposed, he could not live with himself. When he

¹Brooks, op. cit., p. 168.

²Ibid., p. 189.

was writing simply to make money, his writing degraded the beautiful, the distinctive, the cultural. It made the American business man "as good as Titian and a little better."³ Brooks saw in Mark Twain's lack of maturity the reason for his almost total inability to write satire. Not until The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg, in 1900, did Mark Twain begin to write satire, contends Brooks, and his total output of satire was only a smattering of minor works. Instead of jarring America to an insight into its baseless complacencies, he became a champion of the status quo, pointing the accusing finger only when backed by the majority. He went about the world praising America and made it more complacent by lashing out at the English "with a pen warmed up in hell," because Matthew Arnold had seen fit to criticize the language of Mark Twain's beloved friend, General Grant.⁴ His refusal to castigate America was due to his fear of public censure.\

Unlike the satirist, he really believed in the futility of life; and this seems normal to Brooks, for life had been futile for Mark Twain. His desire to quit writing when he was seventy, his feeling that his life had been a moral bondage of dishonesty, insufficiency, and lack of fulfillment all

³Brooks, op. cit., p. 216.

⁴Ibid., pp. 230-232.

point to his failure as an artist. And Brooks found in Mark Twain's last spell of feverish writing not the result of "artistic impulse," but merely the way out of a "life of sin."⁵

There was much discussion in Brooks' book about the repression of the inner artistic spirit of Mark Twain. Alvin Johnson in his review of the book remained unconvinced that there was such a thing as the artist's spirit, but there was no question in his mind that Mark Twain was hindered by his environment. His malady grew out of an age that revered only material success, "the defective character of human material⁶ bent to purposes for which the age had not adapted it." But Johnson thought that Brooks had over-done his picture of capitalistic corruption, for he argued that even Karl Marx admitted no system could break down before reaching its full development. Thus America could not have been very corrupt from 1860 to 1890, because it was still developing.

Representing a much more mature viewpoint than several of his American contemporaries, Friedrich Schönmemann saw Brooks as an extremist who under-estimated American culture. Brooks committed a major sin as a critic by picking his passages to prove his points, especially since Mark Twain was a man of moods, in which case individual passages meant little.

⁵Brooks, op. cit., p. 250.

⁶Alvin Johnson, "The Tragedy of Mark Twain," New Republic, 23:202-203, June 14, 1920.

Schönemann found evidence of Mark Twain's having been influenced by Goldsmith, from whom he borrowed style and the essay form, and also learned knowledge of English character; Lamb, who excelled in the familiar essay; Cervantes, from whom he obtained points of style, satire and humor; Swift, who contributed satire; Dickens, whose Mr. Micawber bears a resemblance to Captain Sellers; Pepys, who himself exposed a corrupt era and wore a white coat; and Carlyle and Emerson, who contributed so much to his philosophy and social thinking.

Schönemann found an element of pessimism in Mark Twain's Western humor which he believes is the reflection of the age. The pessimism became more pronounced after Mark Twain arrived in the East, partly because of the refusal of people to understand the best in him. This helped him despise man, but the more people clamored for the clown, the more he turned to satire.⁷ This lack of realization that he was more than a humorist, as Brooks had said, helped lead Mark Twain to his deterministic philosophy, for he did not want to be regarded as a clown, but rather as a humorist, who uses his office, as Mark Twain himself says, "...to put you into that pensive mood of deep thought, to make you think of your sins..."⁸

⁷Friedrich Schönemann, Mark Twain als Litterarische Persönlichkeit, Verlag der Frommanschen Buchhandlung, (Walder Biedermann), Jena, Germany, 1925, p. 25.

⁸Ibid., p. 24.

Contrary to Brooks, Schö'nemann found Mark Twain an artist, but he was a man of moods as well, and struggled under the weight of a Puritan conscience.⁹ Thus he explained the difficulty in coming to an accurate consideration of him; people were skeptical about the seriousness in his humor, and focussed too much on what he said outside of his humor. Then too he was an ultra-original; but with all his originality, American critics, not realizing that he had inherited much from Europe, made incorrect evaluation of him.

The view that Mark Twain was not a literary man is wrong, says Schö'nemann; it was just that his point of view was ethical rather than esthetic. The Puritan strain in him made for a dislike of anything not genuine or honest. It was this hatred of the false that made him a satirist and reformer. It was this same striving for simple truth that made critics call him an unliterary man, that made him dislike Scott and his artificialities, that made him seek the intrinsic beauty in nature rather than in the romantic artificiality of the poets who described it or the sculptors who reproduced it or the artists who painted it. Yet his sense of humor extended even to his lack of conventionality in his appreciation of the arts: "Well, I ought to have recognized the sign--the old, sure sign that has never failed me in matters of art. Whenever I enjoy¹⁰ anything in art it means that it is mighty poor."

⁹Schö'nemann, op. cit., p. 31.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 72.

Lewis Mumford could not have read Schö'nnemann, for no one familiar with the analysis made by the German critic could have supported Brooks as avidly as did Mumford, who remained one of Brooks' chief disciples, even after DeVoto's Mark Twain's America was published in 1932. It was Mumford who, in reviewing DeVoto's book, found him a romanticist in comparison to Brooks; he felt in 1932 that Brooks' book was just as valid as it had been in 1920.

Mumford argued in the middle Twenties that Mark Twain was caught in the net of the industrialist, and that if he glorified in being captured, he suffered too from its consequences. Industrialism had to be taken "seriously and magniloquently,"¹¹ or life was robbed of its "chief felicities."¹² Mark Twain's childish admiration of the "paleotechnic age" was well brought out in the letter he wrote Whitman, wherein he congratulated him for being able to live in a marvelous age of machinery and science where man was almost at his full stature because of them. Mumford found man almost at his full stature rather as a barbarous warrior nearly capable of destroying himself in World War I.

But worst of all, Mark Twain never even mentioned "... Goethe, Emerson, Tolstoi, and above all.....Whitman himself.This was no accident, but a result of his fundamental

¹¹Lewis Mumford, Golden Day (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1926), p. 170.

¹²Ibid., p. 173.

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Mumford argued in "The Middle Ages" that Mumford was
caught in the net of the industrialist, and that it was given
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Industrialism had to be taken "seriously and respectfully."
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in Lewis Mumford, Golden Age (New York: Boni and Liveright,
1938) p. 170.
Ibid., p. 170.

barbarism," continued Mumford, "Poor Dante! Poor Shakespeare! Thrice happy Whitman! Alas! Of all the jokes Mark Twain ever labored to utter, this that fell so innocently from his pen was perhaps the wryest, and I am not sure but that it may¹³ cling the longest to his memory."

Mumford bears out Brooks when he belabors the society which frustrated imaginative life. Mark Twain conformed to be "ac-¹⁴ceptable to his fellow countrymen." His despair came as a result of his accepting the values that surrounded him which in his simple honesty he did not see as false values; thus he secretly sowed the seeds of despair. For him man became a mere¹⁵ automaton incapable of originality.

Yet Mumford, like all of Brooks' disciples, is guilty of playing up certain sections of Mark Twain's writings to support his theory and paying little or no attention to material that does not support it. Mumford is unable to see that Mark Twain was a humorist first and foremost. He is so concerned with how Mark Twain failed to be the great American artist Mumford thinks he should have been that he misrepresents the man.

Although he absolved Olivia of any detrimental influence on Mark Twain, Fred Lewis Pattee felt that money and the Gilded

¹³Mumford, op. cit., p. 173.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 176.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 178-9.

Age were two very important factors in his failure. He became intoxicated with money and it nearly ruined him not only as an artist but as a business man, because he speculated so wildly.¹⁶ His losses helped to make him an artisan rather than an artist. He achieved his success as a humorist too early, and found it practically impossible to do serious work. His readers demanded humor, and he lacked the patience of a scholar to do the really important things. Here was a man with glorious possibilities "dancing in cap and bells" for money....a thwarted creator like Melville, one hamstrung by his times and his temperament....a collection of glorious fragments...(not)¹⁷ a maker of rounded masterpieces."

When Pattee refused to consider Olivia Clemens as a Delilah, he had wandered from the road Brooks had travelled; this was a temporary detour, however, for when it came to the subject of Mark Twain's pessimism, Pattee was simply Brooks' rearguard reiterating Brooks' theory of the thwarted genius and indulging in the cherished dreams of what Mark Twain might have been.

By the end of the first decade of post-Brooksian criticism, the opinion continued in general to run close to Brooks' interpretation of Mark Twain as a business man, with the possible

¹⁶Fred Lewis Pattee, "On the Reading of Mark Twain," The American Mercury, XIV (1928), 186.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 190-91.

exception of Schönemann, who is given no mention in American criticism, and probably was not read, because of the scarcity of copies of his book and the fact that it has not been translated. Josephson sensed a complete enjoyment on the part of Mark Twain of the strenuous life of the business man. But as Mark Twain favored the labor unions while he was a friend of the capitalist and aware of the excesses of capitalism in the Gilded Age, it was not difficult for him to become a cynic.¹⁸ Parrington saw the tragedy of Mark Twain in the East as "the milk of western humor curdled in his veins."¹⁹

By 1931 there was some modification in the idea of the tragedy wrought by the Gilded Age. It is true that Mark Twain spent a great deal of his time in acquisition, wrote C. Hartley Grattan, and that his failure to rise to his full stature was the fault of the age which used wealth as a measure of success. It is also true that he was not aware "that acquisitiveness must be held in leash if literature is your chosen occupation." But, although he did not succeed in defying the system, he gave the period a name and "understood its knaveries in detail. And in doing so, he hit hard at what he hated in American life."²⁰ Grattan separated Mark Twain's determinism and despair

¹⁸Matthew Josephson, Portrait of the Artist as American, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), pp. 159-160.

¹⁹Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), p.190.

²⁰C. Hartley Grattan, "Mark Twain", American Writers on American Literature, (New York: Horace Liveright, 1930), pp. 278-9.

with regard to their motivating factors. The determinism, he felt, was the result of loving justice, mercy, kindness, tolerance, and democratic living, only to find mankind more and more intolerable as he grew in years. So, "as a sort of escape, he devised a fatalistic and pessimistic determinism as a philosophy which would relieve mankind of the burden of having willed the horrors it committed."²¹ Obviously unaware of Schönnemann's findings, Grattan found Mark Twain merely a "man writing", as compared with Henry James, the "literary man at his highest development."²²

But Grattan had moved away from the simplified theorizings of the Twenties. True, his theory was not complete, but it was well-considered and not dominated by the idea that Mark Twain was not the man he should, or could, have been. Grattan seems to be one of the first American critics who gave credit to Mark Twain for being aware of the veil that acquisition was supposed to have drawn over his eyes.

In Blankenship's study which also appeared in 1931, there is suggested a thought similar to that of Parrington a year earlier, when Blankenship writes about the frontier optimism that was "curdled" by social injustice. Mark Twain probably would not have turned to despair if he had been allowed to

²¹ Grattan, op. cit., p. 276.

²² Ibid., p. 284.

remain a social satirist. Though he succumbed to the Eastern idea of success, his character was never polluted by the age; rather, he was deeply aware of the evil about him. But his hands were tied when he wished to criticize, and thus he became pessimistic. His pessimism was aided by his reading of history and science, rather than poetry or fiction, and his²³ having seen so much misery in the world in his many travels.

Blankenship, too, sees evil forces preventing Mark Twain from fulfilling his inner promptings. But, it may be asked, if Mark Twain wanted so badly to be a social satirist, why did he put his heart into Joan of Arc? He wanted to write social satire, and he did that as DeVoto later pointed out, but anyone familiar with his life is aware that there were many other things that Mark Twain wanted to do. He managed to do most of them, but even that did not prevent him from despair. It is not easy to be sure what contributed greatly or what contributed little. Of this we can be sure: Mark Twain's despair had far more complex causes than one would gather from the Brooksian theories.

There was no aspect of Brooks' thesis that was not rejected by DeVoto. Although his work on Mark Twain's later life and pessimism appeared in a later book, he devoted the

²³Russell Blankenship, American Literature as an Expression of the National Mind, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1931), pp. 457-471.

major part of his book, Mark Twain's America, to destroy Brooks' picture of Mark Twain, the humorist. DeVoto stressed Brooks' incapacity to appreciate humor. This made it impossible for Brooks to have known that Mark Twain wrote satire almost constantly:

The fact is that research can find few elements of the age that Mark Twain did not burlesque, satirize or deride. The whole obscene spectacle of government is ~~passed~~ in review--the Presidency, the Congress, the basis of politics, the nature of democracy, the disintegration of power, and corruption of the electorate--bribery, depravity, subornation, the farce of the people's justice.²⁴

DeVoto argued that Brooks was only trying to use Mark Twain as a club to beat the head of Philistine America, because Brooks felt that Mark Twain avoided serious work. Brooks "had a Puritan hatred of levity when there was austere work to be done."²⁵

DeVoto felt that Brooks belonged in a class with the parlor Freuds. There was no difference between Brooks' assertion that the thwarted artist in Mark Twain avenged itself in influencing him to murder his son, and the pseudo-psychologists who had the notion that the American Radiator tower²⁶ was a phallic symbol.

DeVoto goes beyond Brooks and his successors to attempt

²⁴Bernard DeVoto, Mark Twain's America, p. 267.

²⁵Ibid., p. 263.

²⁶Ibid., p. 228.

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²⁴ Mark Twain's America, p. 237.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 238.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 238.

an understanding of the motives behind the quality of criticism that existed in America in the Twenties and Thirties. His conclusions clarify the position of the followers of Brooks who presented their criticisms in the Brooksonian spirit. DeVoto sees the major part of American criticism as a kind of religious fervor. "It had the weaknesses of religion, specifically a strong preference for emotion as opposed to thought, a selective attitude toward the data of literature which is hardly different from fanaticism, and a willingness to substitute epithet for analysis in the consideration of what is disapproved."²⁷

One of the causes of this critical confusion was the wave of pessimism which overtook this country at the turn of the century. And DeVoto might well have included the speculation that this same pessimism over the futility of America's economic system may have given Mark Twain more fuel for his deterministic philosophy.

Mark Twain fitted well into the realm of Brooksonian criticism as far as the critics themselves were concerned. Why he did so is made readily understandable by an astute observation that DeVoto made in his review of Wagenknecht's book. Mark Twain "was so fluent and so untrammelled by consistency in

²⁷ DeVoto, op. cit., p. 223.

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²⁷ DeVoto, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

setting them (his ideas) down," says DeVoto, "that any critic²⁸ may select and arrange them to suit his own prejudices."

DeVoto waited ten years before he published his Mark Twain at Work, in which he attempted a detailed analysis of Mark Twain's despair from a study of unpublished manuscripts made available to him. There was much criticism during that interval that considered the problem of Mark Twain's pessimism and despair.

Although Ludwig Lewisohn cannot be lumped with the Brooksonian critics, he was guilty to a lesser extent of oversimplification. He called Mark Twain an "eternal adolescent"; he saw Mark Twain's disillusionment and pessimism as a result of his financial failures, the death of dear ones, and an awareness of deep human problems that he found in older countries. If he had not been the adolescent, if he had had values and a philosophy, he might have been able to cope with such problems. But having no such equipment, he sat down like an adolescent to figure out problems with a knowledge so limited²⁹ he did not know enough to state them.

Until 1934, American critics had not seen fit to make use of the important critical contribution made by Schönnemann. Even DeVoto, certainly the foremost American student of Mark Twain, did not mention Schönnemann in his book. It remained for

²⁸New York Times Book Review, Oct. 27, 1935, p. 1.

²⁹Lewisohn, op. cit., p. 25.

Miss Brashear in her Mark Twain, Son of Missouri, to acknowledge the work of the German critic who, a decade before, had classed Brooks' method as pseudo-Freudian. Like Schönnemann, Miss Brashear finds elements in Mark Twain's writings that are traceable to many of the greatest English and American writers. She takes exception with those who claim Mark Twain was not a literary man. She asserts that the early roots of Mark Twain's philosophy are to be found in his reading, during his piloting days, of Tom Paine and Voltaire. From this beginning, Miss Brashear traces the development of Mark Twain's tragedy which evolved as a result of his dealing so extensively with externals that the only assurance he could find lay in "reason and concrete fact, and the facts about life he found to be negative." So, as he grew older, the lines of his thinking, instead of advancing with his century, became more limited.³⁰ Miss Brashear's analysis represents a serious effort to determine the progress of the pessimistic strain in Mark Twain.

Olivia always called her husband "Youth", and Miss Brashear sees in this the spark of that early spirit that remained as long as he lived. But Mark Twain's early dreams miscarried, and as America made the difficult transition into an industrial economy, he saw nothing but gloom ahead. In the end he became "an American Prometheus...and because to him the

³⁰Brashear, op. cit., p. 252.

hope of the world lay in America, his despair was for all
³¹
 mankind."

Miss Brashear does not attempt to judge Mark Twain on the basis of his friendship with business magnates, but she does find in him a passion for social justice that was larger than that of ordinary men. As ^{the} ~~a~~ one who became the "supreme apologist for the American experiment," Mark Twain will always defy final analysis, she feels, and remain always a figure of legend.

The analysis of Miss Brashear is perhaps more speculative than that of DeVoto, but it represents a mature, well-considered approach to the interpretation of Mark Twain. Unlike Brooks, Miss Brashear did not try to load a theory; her contribution represents analysis based on fact and the studied reading of previous critics. She makes no claim to have issued a final judgment. Her tracing the roots of Mark Twain's philosophy to his reading of a skeptic and a deist may be questioned by some, but there can be no doubt as to her scholarly approach and the over-all value of her contribution to a valid understanding of Mark Twain.

By the time Wagenknecht's valuable Mark Twain ^{the Man} and His Work was published, the break away from Brooks was almost complete. Wagenknecht's analysis was exhaustive. Three years before, DeVoto had consigned Brooks to the curiosity shop as a

³¹ Brashear, op. cit., p. 261.

critical freak. Wagenknecht decided to take a look for himself, and after examining this phenomenon, concluded that perhaps DeVoto had been too harsh with Brooks. Some of Brooks' ideas were worthy of consideration. Wagenknecht saw value, for example, in Brooks' interpretation of Mark Twain's inaccuracies about everything but his books in his old age.

Brooks concluded, and Wagenknecht agrees, that although Mark Twain's conscious life was concerned with the non-artistic, his heart was concerned with literature.³²

For an artist, Mark Twain was a great time and energy waster. If he had had less potential he might never have succeeded in getting published what he did. He rarely saw a job through, usually setting it aside to be picked up at a later date. Still Brooks' speculation that Mark Twain was out of tune with the times and therefore unable to obtain sustained literary tone is not received well by Wagenknecht, who compares Mark Twain to Chaucer, a man at peace with his environment and having "unity of tone", who nevertheless produced only one completed long work, Troilus and Criseyde.³³

Wagenknecht confirms the idea that the too early success of Mark Twain as a humorist was bad for him. He does not see

³²Wagenknecht, op. cit., p. 69.

³³Ibid., p. 273, #6.

Mark Twain driven to fulfill his promise to make money for his mother. Having had writing come to him so easily, he looked around and saw the conquests the business men made and he desired some of this same power for himself.³⁴ When he had become a member of the ranks of capital, his humor, as Brooks had said, degraded the spiritual and enabled the business man to laugh at art. Wagenknecht agrees in part with Brooks on this aspect of Mark Twain's work.³⁵ Still Mark Twain was not blind to the true working of his age, as Wagenknecht pointed out in an important excerpt from one of Mark Twain's letters to Twichell, written in 1905:

Well, the nineteenth century made progress--the first progress after 'ages and ages'--colossal progress. In what? Materialities. Prodigious acquisitions were made in those things which add to the comfort of many and make life harder for as many more. But the addition to righteousness? Is it discoverable? I think not. The materialities were not invented in the interest of righteousness; that there is more righteousness in the world because of them than there was before, is hardly demonstrable, I think. In Europe and America there is a vast change (due to them) in ideals--do you admire it? All Europe and all America are feverishly scrambling for money. Money is the supreme ideal--all others take tenth place with the great bulk of the nations named. Money-lust has always existed, but not in the history of the world was it ever a craze, a madness until your time and mine. This lust has rotted these nations; it has made them hard, sordid, ungentle, dishonest, oppressive.

Wagenknecht concludes from this letter:

³⁴Wagenknecht, op. cit., p. 162.

³⁵Ibid., p. 192.

So he learned after all then. Learned that science, too, is a false god, learned what some of us had to wait for the war to find out, that he had been leaning on a broken reed, that materialities cannot solve the problem of human life. The typesetters were working perfectly now, and men had wings at last. For what? For this?-- this that men had in 1905? Poor Mark Twain. He who had believed so passionately. And yet they twit him for his pessimism!³⁶

Wagenknecht sees a possible influence of Calvinism on Mark Twain's pessimism. He does not agree with Brooks' conclusion that Mark Twain's deterministic philosophy was a result of the betrayal of his artistic self to the Gilded Age. Here, as Brooks has done elsewhere, he goes too far. Wagenknecht finds a possible answer in Mark Twain's "trained Presbyterian conscience,"³⁷ "that damned him almost as vigorously when he was wholly innocent as when he was guilty." Wagenknecht asks, "Was there ever a man who had better reason than Mark Twain to curse the name of that cold-blooded reptile among theologians, that prophet of the wrath of God--John Calvin?"³⁸

Still, the tragedies of his dear ones and the responsibility he felt for these deaths were the major causes of his pessimism. "...When I was 43 and John Hay was 41, he said life was a tragedy after 40, and I disputed it. Three years

³⁶Wagenknecht, op. cit., p. 130.

³⁷Ibid., p. 244.

³⁸Ibid., p. 218.

ago he asked me to testify again: I counted my graves, and there was nothing for me to say."³⁹

Like Hamlet, Mark Twain became personally aware of real tragedy that began with the early brutalities in Hannibal, and this was the opening wedge to a consciousness of world tragedy. But there was also his tenderness; he had his vision of the height to which life could go, and this, placed against the thought of what it is, made life unendurable.⁴⁰

That he was a humorist of the ordinary sort even in the early days is a mistaken conception, for "he was a born reformer."⁴¹ Citing as extreme Brooks' statement that Mark Twain was never willing to take up the cudgel in support of an unpopular cause, thus failing to become the "great American satirist," Wagenknecht finds equally extreme the opposite picture by DeVoto that "research can find few elements of the age that Mark Twain did not burlesque, satirize or deride."⁴² Wagenknecht does accept part of each contention, admitting DeVoto's facts but also recognizing Brooks' mention of the Gorky incident, Mark Twain's withholding of articles like the "War Prayer", and his failure to state his conclusions regarding the Boer War.⁴³

³⁹Wagenknecht, op. cit., p. 225.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 226-8.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 234.

⁴²Ibid., p. 239.

⁴³Ibid., p. 238.

Mark Twain, like many others, could not comprehend the changes that had come over his beloved America in the latter part of the century. What he saw drowned his hopes and faith and he turned to his "Gospel" in a last effort to reason man from despair.

The reader of Wagenknecht's Mark Twain--The Man and His Work is impressed by its honesty of judgment. DeVoto felt that Wagenknecht had "set the seal on criticism." But it is questionable whether the seal will ever be set on Mark Twain criticism. As long as men study his life and works, as long as the science of psychology advances, the interpretation of Mark Twain will go on. That Wagenknecht's book is an excellent one there is no doubt. He ranks with DeVoto and Brashear. Yet at the present time he feels, with the new information and interpretations that the passage of a decade or more has brought, that he treated Brooks too considerately.

R. C. Altick, writing in the same year as Wagenknecht, showed a basic influence of Lewisohn. Altick, too, felt that Mark Twain was an eternal adolescent out of his element. Mark Twain was a typical American, not a frustrated Shelley; he was a great humorist, but a not-so-great intellectual figure or artist. His was not an ordeal of psychological frustration as a result of betrayal of his artistic instincts. Living among those who had a common pursuit of wealth and prestige, he did his best to please them by adopting their standards and customs. It was not surrender, but conformity for love. He

displayed the "aesthetic tastes of a fourteen-year-old": shallow judgments on serious subjects, "a delight in surreptitious obscenity," a childish revengeful attitude, and an effort to solve the problems of the universe without benefit of the thought⁴⁴ of the great thinkers who had preceded him.

Masters' version in 1938 was, as has been shown, essentially the same picture as the one Brooks had created. Masters agreed with Henry James who said that Mark Twain "appealed to rudimentary minds...When the call came to attack the great abuses, he was by social and political ties committed to silence about them, being dyed in them himself and blinded by his interests to see them."⁴⁵

He was no great satirist but a mere boy beset by fears and tears, and childish penitences, and unpredictable change. He might have made writing a full-time job if he had not been so hungry for money, for he had no financial problem, from his beginning in the East. His spiritual collapse was the result of having "no genuine convictions about any.....important thing, no philosophy of life, no compelling ideals, no political principles, no theory of the literary art and faith, no belief in man, in liberty, in institutions, in possible

⁴⁴R. D. Altick, "Mark Twain's Despair: An Explanation in Terms of his Humanity," South Atlantic Quarterly, XXXIV (Oct. 1935) 359-67.

⁴⁵Edgar Lee Masters, Mark Twain: A Portrait, (New York: Charles Scribners and Sons, 1938), p. 138.

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⁴⁴ R. D. Altick, "Mark Twain's Dilemma: An Examination of
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 1955), 552-57.
⁴⁵ Edgar Lee Masters, Mark Twain: A Portrait (New York:
 Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), p. 128.

progress for the race, in the potential influence of the
civilizing process."⁴⁶

Few critics absolved Mark Twain of his behavior when Maxim Gorky was found to have visited the country with a woman whom he brought without benefit of wedlock. Gorky had come here to secure funds for the prospective Russian revolution. He was received with open arms, but when it became known that he was not married to this woman, they were both turned out of their hotel. With Mark Twain's sanction, plans for a dinner honoring Gorky were dropped, and Mark Twain rebuked Gorky for having violated custom. Brooks had lashed out at Mark Twain for his criticism of Gorky. An occasional critic gave Mark Twain a belabored excuse on behalf of his thorough Victorian indoctrination in prudishness. Masters called it "...a piece of church-ridden, monopoly-choked ethics of that cheap and nasty and lying time of the Philippine conquest and the python coil of monopoly."⁴⁷

It is ten years since Masters wrote his portrait of Mark Twain. Since that time there have been no other graduates of the Brooksian school. Masters may be the last of the group. Although he appears to have received the Brooksian indoctrination, he lacks the finesse of the founding father. As

⁴⁶Masters, op. cit., p. 169.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 198.

Wagenknecht so aptly put it in his review of Masters' book: "What Mr. Brooks could not do with a scalpel, Mr. Masters is hardly likely to do with a bludgeon."⁴⁸ Among other things, Wagenknecht found Masters unfair in his attack on In Defense of Harriet Shelley, and hysterical on the Gorky matter. Wagenknecht remained the careful analyst in this review, however, and after showing the many shortcomings in Masters' book, felt it necessary to credit him with the few correct observations he had made. Masters was right in calling Mark Twain a poor critic; he was right in his treatment of Mark Twain's absurd book on Shakespeare and that ridiculous letter to Whitman. Masters also made the correct observation that Mark Twain was handicapped by his inability to refuse to be distracted by thousands of trifles.

Although Masters made some correct observations, his book must be condemned for the same error made by Brooks in the revised edition of The Ordeal of Mark Twain of 1932. Neither one paid any attention to the wealth of critical material that had been printed since Brooks' first edition was published.

Despite the fact that Mark Twain was interested primarily in the financial return from his writing, rather than its literary future, despite the fact that he was more interested,

⁴⁸New York Times Book Review, May 8, 1938, 10.

in his middle years, in machinery and invention, he wrote The Gilded Age. This seeming contradiction, wrote Walter Fuller Taylor in 1938, was responsible to a large extent for Van Wyck Brooks' thesis that Mark Twain was a "natural artist unhappily thwarted by his environment." Having become in effect such a great magnate, he could no longer be the critic of his age, and had to surrender himself to the position of spokesman of the majority..⁴⁹ But Taylor argues correctly that Mark Twain did not surrender himself to the Gilded Age; actually he never ceased to satirize it.

Taylor cites a number of instances to show that Mark Twain never lost his critical view of the times:

1. In The Curious Republic of Gondour (1875), he put education above property.
2. He switched his party in 1884 because he felt the capitalists' favorite was corrupt.
3. He fiercely opposed the tariff, dear to the hearts of manufacturers.
4. He defended the trade union and collective bargaining.
5. In 1880, he came out against imperialism and the industrial exploitation of the Pacific Islanders.
6. He fought cupidity in The \$30,000 Bequest and The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg.

⁴⁹Walter Fuller Taylor, "Mark Twain and the Machine Age", South Atlantic Quarterly, XXVII (October, 1938), 388-9.

7. He resolved to pay his debts in full, rather than accept the advice of business associates and declare a condition of bankruptcy.
8. He scathingly attacked the aggrandizing factory owner whose workers' standard of living becomes more bestial, in The Mysterious Stranger.
9. In The Connecticut Yankee, he defended the masses against the classes, by showing what the church and state had done to them.
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In spite of Mark Twain's considerable additions to social criticism, Taylor feels that he was not a master among social critics, for he had no knowledge of Marx, Morris, Ruskin, Henry George, or Edward Bellamy. Nor did he have a critical mind. He lacked self-discipline and his work was fragmentary.

Taylor is right when he insists that it is a mistake to attempt an understanding of Mark Twain from the point of view of the 1920's. Rather we should consider him in the light of the 1850's or 1890's. In this proper perspective, the disparity of artist versus business man does not exist. At this time, when the machine was just coming in, many new problems were to arise upon its emergence into the American scene. Taylor sees Mark Twain fascinated by the potentialities of the machine, but attacking its abuses as well. His philosophy was

⁵⁰Taylor, op. cit., p. 390-91.

simply acquisition, control of abuses and "concern for the in-
⁵¹terests of the whole people."

In DeVoto's second major work on Mark Twain, Mark Twain at Work, he seems to have reconsidered the value of psychology as a tool for analysis. He had doubted its value in his first work, and Mumford had criticized him for such an attitude. Whether he paid any attention to Mumford, who belonged to the Brooksonian school, is not evident. He did, however, use the method in his second book, and arrived at some of his theories through it. In his chapter called "The Symbols of Despair," he draws attention to the fact that his findings are speculative⁵² and incapable of proof, but based on fact wherever possible.

Here is presented a theory to supersede the speculation of Van Wyck Brooks which he thought was "wholly wrong." Mark Twain had few peers, if any, when it came to popularity and the esteem of people all around the world. For this man, to sink into the sloughs of pessimism and despair toward the end, left much room for conjecture. DeVoto's assertion is that Mark Twain was faced with too much adversity in the short space of a half dozen years. To the one who was the darling of the gods came the failure of the Webster Company, of the Paige Typesetting Machine, of his own health; there was the death of Susy,

⁵¹Taylor, op. cit., p. 394-6.

⁵²Bernard DeVoto, Mark Twain at Work, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942), p. 106.

and his wife, and the decline of Jean.

His feverish writing was the result of the fear that he had lost his touch. In his despair, he bordered on insanity. His conscience told him he was responsible for all his tragedy—thus the feverish attempt to find absolution, which came with his final conviction that life is a dream and therefore he was
54
guiltless.

Pellowe, whose repudiation of Brooks is on a level with that of DeVoto, saw nothing unusual in the pessimism of Mark Twain, who lived in an age of pessimism. There was Nietzsche, who saw man as "an arrow shot in the dark," and Bertrand Russell, who saw man as "tiny lumps of pure carbon and water." Dostoyevsky called man "the creature without a sense of grati-
55
tide," and Beaudelaire, "the creature exiled in the imperfect."

Pellowe, speaking in a tone reminiscent of Walter Fuller Taylor, cautions against chastising Mark Twain for not becoming a satirist, when The Gilded Age was the only noteworthy
56
satirical book of the Nineties.

* * * * *

Mark Twain criticism has come a long way since the first edition of Van Wyck Brooks' The Ordeal of Mark Twain. Much

⁵³ DeVoto, Mark Twain At Work, pp. 106-108.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 124-130.

⁵⁵ Pellowe, op. cit., p. 235.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 241.

original evidence that was not available to Brooks in 1920 has been discovered. More intensive studies of Mark Twain's works have been completed. In the light of all the evidence and criticism since 1920 it might help complete the evaluation of Brooks' book if his present views of Mark Twain were available. It is fortunate for this study that in 1947 Van Wyck Brooks published his The Times of Melville and Whitman, for the book contains some mention of Mark Twain and a noticeable change in Brooks' attitude.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the 1947 Brooksonian thesis is the lack of mention of the initial repression wrought by Jane Clemens and that barren frontier. Brooks now calls Mark Twain "the serio-comic Homer of this old primitive Western world, its first pathfinder in letters, its historian and poet."⁵⁷ This is not only a tribute to Mark Twain, but also a partial acknowledgement of the value of other criticism in the intervening years. Brooks' picture today is much brighter than it was twenty-seven years ago. Now Mark Twain is "a symbol of America,...incomparably funny."⁵⁸ Brooks seems to have picked up a sense of humor in the past quarter century. Mark Twain was the irreverent disabuser of shams which he hoped to "laugh

⁵⁷ Van Wyck Brooks, The Times of Melville and Whitman, (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1947), p. 300.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 450.

into the grave." He was the all but unparalleled emblem of his country....a national pet.⁵⁹ As a literary figure he was "the greatest folk-writer of his time."

But he wrote for money, had little respect for his writing, and had poor critical judgment of what he wrote. He had "little of the inner control of the artist."⁶⁰ He was a businessman attracted to wealth but fearing it, lauding the plutocrat in his published works and decrying him in his private letters.⁶¹ And Brooks reaches one of the same conclusions of a quarter century before, that Mark Twain was a "seriously divided soul."⁶² Brooks indicates the forces at work that set up this division, but Olivia and her friends seem to have lost importance as influences on Mark Twain. The influence of the age and capitalism remain the important contributing factors to Mark Twain's lack of freedom, making him an artist only "now and then."⁶³

The edge seems to be gone from that scalpel which Brooks used to dismember America's darling, exposing the tragic workings of a mind that failed to approach its potentialities; nor is the hand as steady now as it was then. Probably time and the unfavorable response of competent critics has compelled a more studied approach. Still the present-day Brooks

⁵⁹ Brooks, op. cit., p. 452.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 453-4.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 460.

⁶² Ibid., p. 461.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 463.

is too glib in his treatment of Mark Twain. He refuses to admit most of his errors, and uses the same vague generalities of which he was so guilty twenty-seven years ago. It is only by the omission of certain of his earlier ideas that he acknowledges some of his mistakes; but today, even after the destruction of the main arguments of his thesis, he arrives at the same judgment, that Mark Twain was a split personality. Such reasoning puts the seal on Brooks' criticism. The Brooksian school has long since ceased to be considered a reliable guide to the understanding of Mark Twain. It is now defunct.

is too little in his treatment of any single subject to
do justice to his work, and even the most careful reader
of which he has no other than a very general view, it is
for the omission of certain of his earlier books that he is
known now of his readers; and these, even after the passage
of time, are the same of his books, as evidence of the
fact that his work was a very consecutive, and
reasoning that the real in his earlier books. The reader
should not lose sight of the fact that the reader should
to the reader of his work. It is not a book.

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ABSTRACT

In 1920 Van Wyck Brooks wrote The Ordeal of Mark Twain, an analysis of Mark Twain's life. This was an effort to explain why Mark Twain failed to become the great artistic figure that Brooks thought he might have been, why, according to Brooks, Mark Twain produced less than a handful of books that will have any lasting value, why he allied himself with the majority, and lived to a tragic old age beset with pessimism, despair, and a philosophy of determinism.

Brooks' book was the first major piece of criticism on Mark Twain to be published after his death. The purpose of this study has been to trace the influence of this book on subsequent criticism, and to evaluate Brooks' work in the light of later studies.

Brooks finds four basic reasons for Mark Twain's failure to achieve his highest fulfillment: there was that barren, cultureless frontier where he was born and reared; there was the influence of his Calvinist mother, for whom he felt he must be a success materially (which success, of necessity, came at the expense of artistic fulfillment), and thus became a clown, an action he regretted all his life; the third reason was the loss of his individuality at the hands of his wife and her friends who moulded him into a form to fit the graces of a conventional society, so that he could not speak out against the abuses of his age; finally there was the Gilded Age itself,

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conventional society, so that he could not speak out against

the abuses of his age; finally there was the illness he himself,

which used money as the only measuring stick of a man's worth, compromising man's individuality, and conspiring against the creative life.

Brooks, in his book, dismembered America's darling to show the inner workings of a man who, Brooks thought, did much and yet accomplished little. Brooks felt that here was a lesson for the artists of America "to put away childish things and walk the stage as poets do."

After the publication of The Ordeal of Mark Twain, there was a need among Mark Twain readers as well as among Mark Twain critics for a reexamination of the man. But a strange thing happened. During the first ten to twelve years following The Ordeal of Mark Twain, the majority of the critics felt that Brooks had made a well-considered analysis. There was one sole important dissenter, and although he wrote in 1925, no one seems to have paid any attention to him until 1934, when Professor Minnie M. Brashear recognized his value. Friedrich Schöнемann wrote his book in German and it was never translated. The evidence he had compiled would have broke the Brooksonian dam, but since he received no acknowledgment here for at least nine years, the honor fell to Bernard DeVoto.

DeVoto's Mark Twain's America was the answer to Brooks. In it DeVoto carefully set forth the facts that supported his contention that Brooks had a theory about Mark Twain and had sought and used nothing in Mark Twain's life that did not support his theory. But this was not all; Brooks had

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distorted facts to suit his purposes. DeVoto concluded that Brooks was a humorless sort of parlor Freud.

Prior to DeVoto's book, which appeared in 1932, there were a number of critics, aside from Schönemann, who formed reasonable judgments of Mark Twain without succumbing to the Brooksian line, but no concerted effort was made to disprove his statements. Mark Van Doren, writing in the Dictionary of American Biography, C. Hartley Grattan, in a chapter of American Writers on American Literature, and Ludwig Lewisohn, in Expression in America, formed independent analyses which made no attempt at wild theorizings, but rather tried to contribute to an understanding of Mark Twain.

In spite of the evidence contributed by these critics (Schonemann, as has been said, was not discovered here until 1934), a revised edition of Brooks' book was published in 1933. It contained a mere handful of minor changes. The reviewers, who had not been especially favorable to Brooks in 1920, generally agreed that this disregard of the findings of interim critics was not in the spirit of science or scholarship.

But this same disregard of evidence that did not support their theories was typical of the Brooksian school, and along with it went the fault of passage-picking to support their theories and the use of the general statement unsupported by fact.

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Following DeVoto by two years, Professor Hershner, in

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based on much research in Mark Twain's home state. Her discoveries led her to refute the theory that the Middle West had suppressed Mark Twain and brought about tragic results. She found in Schönemann's Mark Twain als Literarische Persönlichkeit the answer to Brooks' assertion that Mark Twain had failed to become the artist he could have been. Schönemann had made a penetrating study of Mark Twain's reading and writing. He had traced the influence on Mark Twain of a number of eighteenth century European masters, and had concluded that Mark Twain ranks with the greatest English and American writers as a master of prose style and humor, as a social philosopher and a literary personality.

In Edward Wagenknecht's Mark Twain: The Man and His Work, the same high critical standards as those of DeVoto and Brashear are found. Wagenknecht left few stones unturned in his search for all the evidence that went into the making of the man, Mark Twain; in his search he found that although Brooks had used his psychological scalpel like a tyro, he managed to make a few deft strokes. Today, however, Wagenknecht is inclined to deny credit to Brooks even for the little he did that was justified. Brooks' continued lack of historical objectivity, plus the studies of subsequent critics, have probably contributed to change Wagenknecht's conclusions. Still Wagenknecht gave a remarkably fine appraisal of Mark Twain, so much so that DeVoto felt that Wagenknecht had put the seal on Mark Twain criticism. Wagenknecht found no inner frustration, nor any thwarting of

Mark Twain by the pruderies or repressions he was said to have borne; Mark Twain led a happy married life, and was actually aided by those who, it has been said, repressed him. Mark Twain was a man of many interests, yet he was not superficial; it was his sensitivity and love of man that caused him to lose faith in what he felt was an ominous future. His humor is of first importance, but he also did worthwhile writing in the realm of satire and serious prose.

Since 1935, there has been much Mark Twain ^{criticism}. Although DeVoto contributed enough to show the worthlessness of The Ordeal of Mark Twain, critics are still adding to the pile of evidence against Brooks. Much worthwhile material has been presented in the periodicals. Max Eastman considered the early background of Olivia, and showed that Elmira had an intellectual atmosphere and freedom that Brooks never dreamed of. Walter Fuller Taylor studied Mark Twain's connections with industry to show that Mark Twain had not sold himself out to capitalism. Delancey Ferguson studied the Huckleberry Finn manuscript to find the extent of Olivia's and Howells' refinement of Mark Twain.

And there have been more comprehensive works: Benson made a thorough study of the Western life of Mark Twain, and proved Brooks wrong on a number of counts. Ferguson, while contributing to the Mark Twain legend, found fault with much in Brooks. Pellowe made an intensive study of the religious aspect of Hannibal, and showed that religion had accomplished

much in the civilizing process. The frontier needed a strong religion.

Surprisingly enough, there are still those who are pushing Brooks' theory. The followers of Brooks included men like O'Higgins and Reade, Mumford, Josephson, Hazard, Pattee, Parrington, Blankenship, Arvin, Leacock, and Masters. Some of them are still plying their trade. By disregarding those who disagree with them, they continue their blind parrotry of Brooks' ideas. Brooks himself, writing in 1947, uses some of the vague generalizations of which he was so guilty twenty-seven years ago. By virtue of omissions, he acknowledges some of his mistakes; but today, even after the destruction of the main arguments of his thesis, he arrives at the same judgment, that Mark Twain was a split personality. Such reasoning puts the seal on Brooks' criticism.

The Brooksonian school tried to jump to a conclusive explanation of Mark Twain's life and work without bothering to support its theories with fact. Thus in the final analysis, it contributed little or nothing to a true understanding of the man. Its main value, as we see it today, is that it stimulated research by more competent scholars. The deathblow has been struck by an overwhelming army: Schönemann, DeVoto, Brashear, Wagenknecht, Benson, Ferguson, Pellowe, and others. The Brooksonian school has breathed its last.

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